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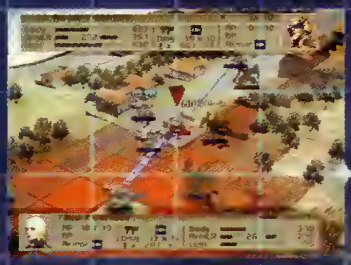
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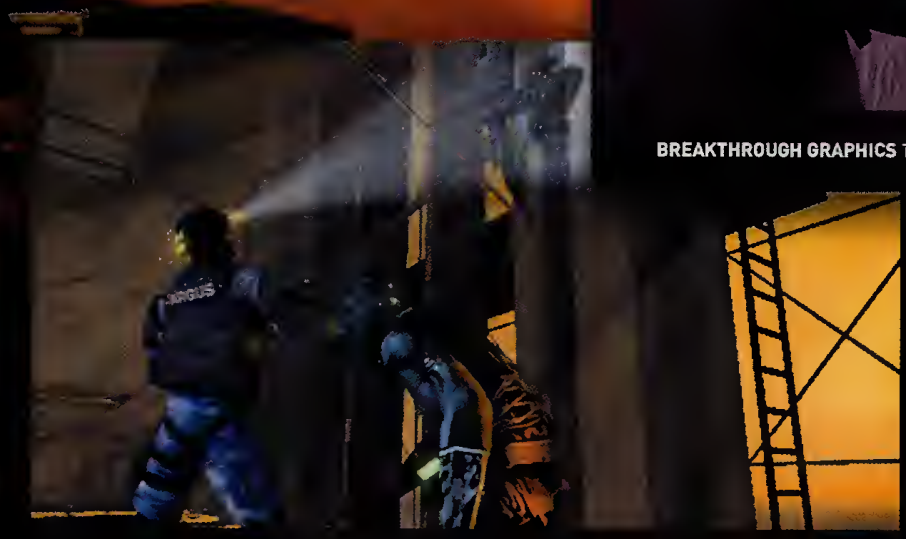
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CONTENTS

ON THE COVER

ISSUE 18

068 KINGDOM COME
→ The Square/Disney collaboration continues

076 ZESTY PC CUISINE
→ A tasty gaming rig for every palate

080 RIDDICK RETURNS
→ Vin Diesel's company's first game stars...guess who?

FRONT

GMR NEWS NETWORK

019 HALF-LIFE 2 HANDS-ON
→ We finally slip into Gordon Freeman's shoes again. Hey, they fit!

020 E3 NEWS
→ From the show floor to our ears to your eyes

022 VIEWTIFUL JOE 2
→ Viewtiful news for PS2 owners, as well as GameCube buffs

023 PRINCE OF PERSIA 2
→ It's not out till fall, but peep the screens now

NEXT

INCOMING GAMES

033 STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME
036 MECHASSAULT 2
038 DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA: AVATAR TUNER
042 ARMORED CORE: NEXUS
044 KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOLUME 2
044 RIBBIT KING
046 GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX
052 THE RED STAR
054 SPY FICTION
056 ROME: TOTAL WAR
058 PAPER MARIO 2
059 THE GETAWAY 2
060 RISE OF THE KASAI
061 STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION
062 CRIMSON TEARS
064 DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY
065 SPIDER-MAN 2
066 FINAL FANTASY XI: CHAINS OF PROMATHIA





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THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES 083
LA PUCELLE: TACTICS 085
SHREK 2: THE GAME 085
PAINKILLER 086
RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS 086
METAL SLUG 3 087
MARIO GOLF: ADVANCE TOUR 087
RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2 088
MANHUNT 089
MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG 089
FUTURE TACTICS: THE UPRISING 090
GALACTIC WRESTLING: FEATURING ULTIMATE MUSCLE 090
FRONT MISSION 4 091
UFC: SUDDEN IMPACT 092
SHINING FORCE: RESURRECTION OF THE DARK DRAGON 092
RED DEAD REVOLVER 093

MORE
TIPS. CODES. ARCHIVES

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES 097
→ A walk-through that will get you past the sticky parts

TOP 10 TIPS: A.I. 100
→ Cheat your way to glory in *Fight Night 2004* and *NBA Ballers*

CONNECT 102
→ Can you believe *EverQuest* is just five? It's so mature for its age.

THE LIST 104
→ Lush, luxe, lavish, lovable

REGULARS
THE GIFTS THAT KEEP ON GIVING

PEOPLE 012
→ Welcome to the nuthouse

POST 014
→ We literally laughed our heads off at your mail

GAMEPORT: ARRIVALS/DEPARTURES 020
→ The games of summer arriveth

CHARTS 025
→ April 2004's shining stars revealed

GAME GEEZER 110
→ What's with the hurry for new consoles?

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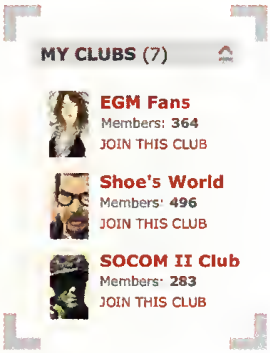


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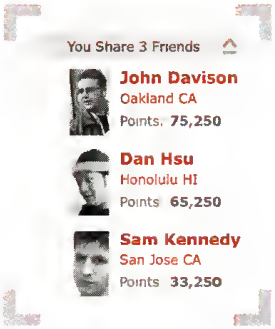
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As I write this, tonight is the last episode of *Friends*. Yep, I watch it. So do you! Don't deny it.

That's not what I want to talk about. I mean, I do want to talk about friends, but *real* friends, not imaginary ones like you see on *Survivor*. I mean the friends you can find on the Internet.

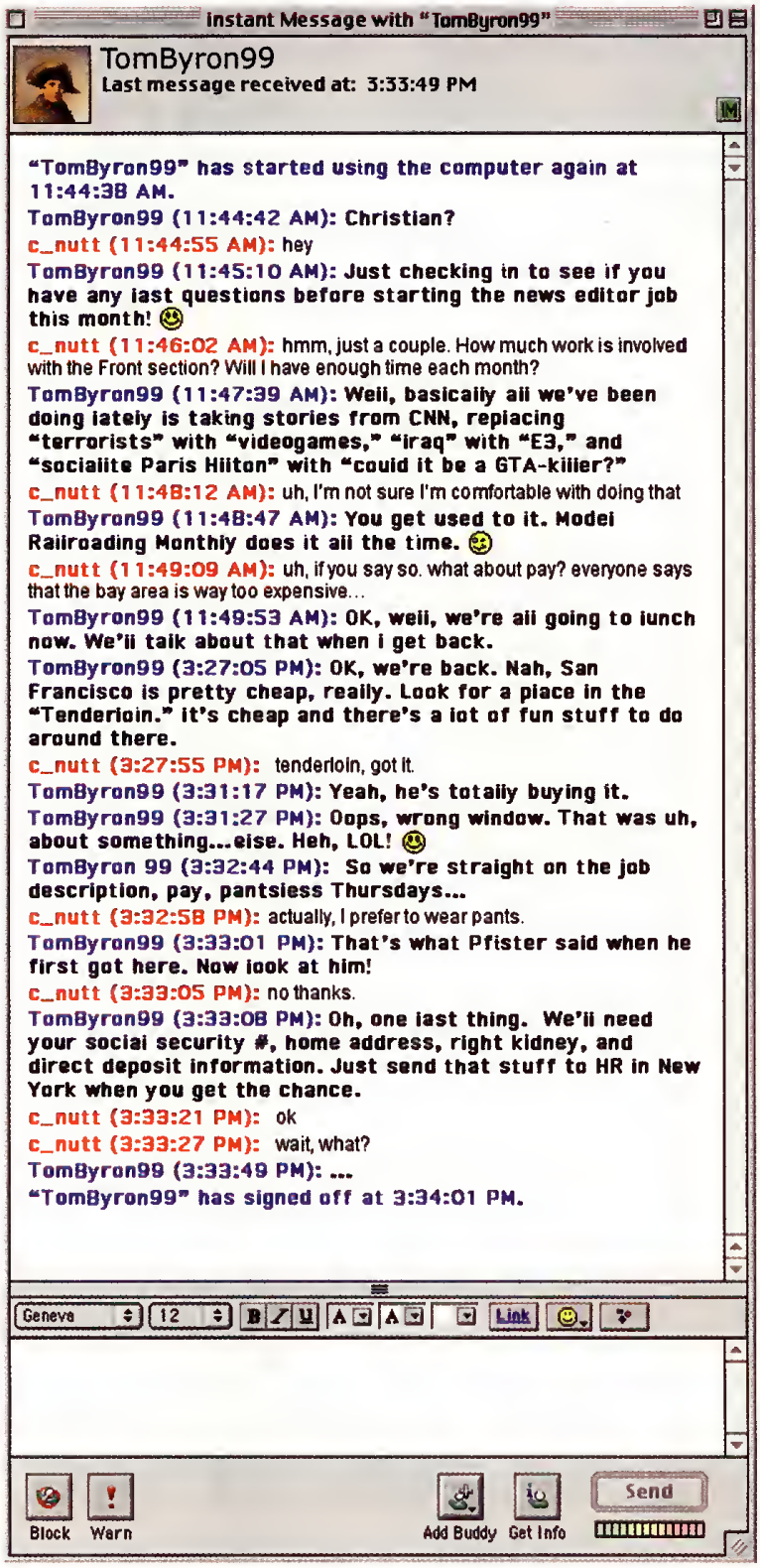
It may come as a surprise that while you're losing weight, making loads of cash in your spare time, and enhancing various body parts, you could be spending more time learning about games and meeting people just like you who share similar interests.

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And please say hi to Christian Nutt, *GMR*'s newest editor. He sits next to Skip and Caroline. Oh, and he's heard every single joke possible about his name, so don't even try.

_Tom Byron_EIC



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POST

WE LITERALLY GOT LIKE, A BILLION LETTERS THIS MONTH. FOR REAL



→ Since we had approximately 14 hours to put together this issue (thanks a lot, E3, you jerk), there wasn't enough time for you guys and gals to respond to *GMR* #17. Not that there was anything to respond about...*GMR* #17 was *flawless*.

MAD MAX

Hello, I'm writing to express my disappointment in LucasArts deciding to can production on what would have truly been one of THE games of the year: *Sam & Max 2*.

Sam & Max was one of the greatest, and weirdest, games of all time. From the giant ball of twine in Minnesota to the mysterious hole in Washington, it was one heck of a challenging and fun game. The graphics still look great after all these years (for 2D).

Out of nowhere, LucasArts issued this press release:

"After careful evaluation of current marketplace realities and underlying economic considerations, we've decided that this was not the appropriate time to launch a graphic adventure on the PC," says *Mike Nelson, acting general manager and VP of finance and operations.*

Despite the fact that *Escape from Monkey Island* is out and *Leisure Suit Larry* is coming soon, this is the most opportune time to release a graphic adventure game. There is virtually no competition right now. DreamCatcher is making good profits off the adventure market because it is the only one that is really in it. Heck, the company is expanding for goodness' sake. In 2002, it was Canada's fifth fastest-growing profitable company. After that big year, it was still 20th in 2003. Yeah, I think there's a market there.

_Dave B.

I am one of the many *Sam & Max* fans irritated by the cancellation of *Sam & Max 2*. I'm just adding to the grandiose cause of trying to resurrect the project by politely asking for publicity.

_Ryan Hurteau

The people have spoken. And we agree: Long live Sam & Max!

ALL LIT UP

Lately, I've been noticing that an alarming number of people have a tendency to use the word "literally" wrong. Here is the definition of the word "literally": in a manner that is without exaggeration, metaphor, or embellishment. Here is an example of the correct way to use it. This guy goes to speak at a high school graduation, but he forgot his speech and says into the microphone, "I'm speechless—literally." He said "literally" because he wanted the audience to know that he meant he didn't have his speech, and not that he didn't know what to say.

And when a person says to me, "My town is literally the size of a postage stamp," I can't help but cringe. The same goes for the way one James Mielke wrote "This game isn't for the weak or weary, as it will literally kick the crap out of you." (Issue #16, *Ninja Gaiden*, page 86.) The videogame is absolutely not going to strike you until feces are forcefully removed from your body. That's all there is to it! You guys need to get with the program!

_Tom Mizrahi



→ Tom had to take a sick day.

Tom got so mad at Mielke for messing that up, he stormed into his office and screamed so loudly his head literally exploded.

SONG REMAINS THE SAME

Obviously, I have to start off with the ritualistic words that are none other than "I love your magazine!" I'm just writing to you guys to ask what you think about music in the gaming industry.

I'm all for original music and remixes in videogames, but I've always thought that putting general music in games would be great. For example, you've always got your games like *NFL Fever 2003* with music by N.E.R.D., and *Amped 2* with multiple bands such as Sunday's Best (great band, by the way) and Yellowcard, but then you have games that approach music differently.

Rainbow Six 3 has some very repetitive theme music that I get tired of, and sometimes I wish I could just kill some of my buddies online to the sound of Dream Theater's "Acid Rain," instead of some *Star Trek*-ish tune that I could play on the piano without

MESSAGE BOARD JUNKIES

This month on GMR's message board, kaorizero ponders what the worst game of all time is. Surprisingly (or not), two people mentioned two different Ronald McDonald–themed games. They're totally not lovin' it.

Not an easy decision, but I think I'd have to say it is *E.T.* for the 2600. It helped bring an industry to its knees.
_kaorizero

As for the worst game I've played, I'd have to say *Ronald McDonald's Magical Adventure* (I think) on the Genesis. I could easily get to the last boss but I could never beat him.
_LuigiSunshine

Umm...worst game ever. A different *Ronald McDonald* game on the NES. I couldn't jump high enough to get past the first part of the second level. I was 5. I could probably do it now.
_crossbone

Postal 2.
_irishmalt

The Incredible Crash Test Dummies for SNES...it haunts my dreams (especially since I could never get past like the 4th level. Maybe it was for the best).
_XenoBach

Mortal Kombat Advance on GBA. 2nd place is *Flintstones Bowling* for PS1.
_PaulGonza

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being a piano player.

I've discovered many bands through games such as *Amped 2* and some mainstream sports games that carry more artist-driven and fewer *Mario*-oriented tunes. And I'm not sayin' that original music is bad, 'cuz the music found in *Halo* couldn't be better, but if games are gonna have original music, it should be well thought out and not just fancied up with some remixed organ music in the background to make it sound kinda cool.

I think that given the right circumstances, games can be and are a great outlet for different bands and music genres—the gaming industry could have a huge positive effect on bands that have no publicity.

_Karl N.

Excellent thoughts, Karl. We're huge music fans, and few things pain us more than crappy tunes in an otherwise decent game. In our humble opinion, many developers seem to be concentrating more on technical audio issues rather than actual composition. Who cares about 7.1 surround sound when all you're getting is a droning, repetitive drum beat? Music shouldn't overpower and distract from a game, but it definitely needs to be more than background filler. Props to publishers like EA (*SSX 3*) and Rockstar (*GTA*) for obtaining good licensed music, but not everyone can afford to purchase rights. So much to say on this topic, and so little space....

ROOK TAKES STEVE MCQUEEN

I have this great idea for a game! You make the best board game of all time into a videogame. No, I'm not speaking of *Candy Land*, you dumb brutes, but of chess! People would be flocking to the stores! We could put famous celebrities into it, like Gary Coleman and Richard Simmons! Think of the appeal! And no one has done it before, either. I mean, everyone plays chess, right? RIGHT??? HELP ME PLEASE.

_Anonymous

Though we can't deny the innate appeal of B-list celebrity chess, we're afraid that the best board game of all time is *Star Wars Trivial Pursuit*. Actual mind-melting question: "What does Luke use to climb into his X-wing?" Answer: A ladder.

DOG SHOW!

Love your magazine. Please show this picture of my doggie Pepe in your magazine because he likes to sit by me whenever I play videogames. He's a toy poodle and has recently turned 6.

P.S. Should we start referring to videogames as something other than "videogames"? I believe the connotation of "game" is what has made politicians and people who don't enjoy gaming label them as kid stuff. Perhaps we could start a revolution and it would all begin with your magazine! What are your suggestions?

_DEUStantus



→ Pepe is a good dog.

We'd suggest calling them "Interactive Adult Entertainment," but that's already been taken. Plus, we'd have to change the name of our magazine to *SXR*. And Pepe wouldn't like that. NO HE WOULDN'T! WHO'S A GOOD DOG!?!

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AD INDEX

A.D. Vision	www.advfilms.com	65
Activision	www.activision.com	15
Capcom USA Inc.	www.capcom.com	55
Electronics Boutique/EBworld	www.ebgames.com	6-7, 35, 40-41, 53, 79, 95
Full Sail Real World Education	www.fullsail.com	23
Microsoft	www.microsoft.com	29
Nokia Telecommunications	www.n-gage.com	37
Nova Logic, Inc	www.novalogic.com	30-31
Pepsi-Cola Company	www.mountaindew.com	13
Sony Computer Entertainment	www.scea.com	43
Sony Pictures Ent. - Columbia	www.sonypictures.com	21
Square Enix U.S.A., Inc.	www.square-enix-usa.com	2-3
THQ Inc.	www.thq.com	50-51
Toyota Motor	www.scion.com	26a-26d
Ubisoft Entertainment	www.ubisoft.com	4-5
Vivendi Universal Games	www.vugames.com	111-114
Wizards of the Coast	www.wizards.com	17, 45



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PS1
GBA
PC
GAMECUBE
XBOX
PS2

FRONT

GMR NEWS NETWORK

IN THE NEWS

HANDS-ON: HALF-LIFE 2 019
Our first taste of the year's most hyped PC game

E3 NEWS: NINTENDO DS, SONY PSP 020
Peep the new handhelds from Nintendo and Sony

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2 022
The red hot man is back, and Capcom's not stopping there

PRINCE OF PERSIA 2, PHANTOM 023
The stunning adventure gets a sequel. The fabled system appears

TALENT: CHRIS VRENNA 024
Former Nine Inch Nails man talks *Doom 3*

INTERNATIONAL REPORT 026
The best wacky game you'll play in 2004: *Katamari Damacy*





→ Our friends, the headcrabs, reappear. Aren't they just adorable? *Half-Life 2* is chock full of atmosphere, with graphics that make a subtle, yet bold, impact.

IT'S ALIVE!

UP CLOSE AND PEASONAL WITH HALF-LIFE 2

U.S.A.

It's a bit of an understatement at this point to say that Valve Software and Vivendi Universal's upcoming PC FPS sequel, *Half-Life 2*, has garnered a thoroughly notorious reputation. Since its early 2003 announcement—and because of that shocking source-code theft incident—the game has been an enormous hype machine, missing one release date after another and building exorbitant expectations among gamers. Will it live up to the hype? We'll reserve our answer until we see the finished product, but nevertheless, we recently had a chance to take *Half-Life 2* for a short but thrilling spin.

One of the first things anyone is likely to notice about this game—which isn't much of a revelation at this point—is that it looks *very* good. The trailers, technical demos, and in-game footage that we've seen aren't just smoke and mirrors; this is the real deal, and it's every bit as breathtaking as the previously released material would have you believe. The physics, which Valve touted extensively at last year's E3, seem well done, but we didn't get the chance to try our hand at any of the grand stunts that last year's demonstrations promised.

We did, however, get a chance to meander down a few eerie city streets as we stepped back into the shoes of Gordon Freeman. A handful of cantankerous soldiers herded us through various checkpoints, taking every opportunity to punish us for even the slightest bump with a good solid clubbing. On the city outskirts, we hopped into a turbocharged buggy, zooming along a twisty mountain road (and off a couple cliffs) before whipping out the gravity gun to deal with some pesky magnetic homing mines and finally laying waste to a squad of hostile soldiers with our trusty shotgun.

So, will it live up to the hype? It's probably safe to say that this is no *Enter the Matrix*, but *Half-Life 2* has some mighty high hopes to fill—and from our impressions, it should make for an accessible and entertaining single-player experience...that is, if it ever comes out. Valve Marketing Director Doug Lombardi cites a vague "summer 2004" release date; given the game's spotty history for meeting deadlines, we'll believe it when we see it.

GOOD TOUCH

NINTENDO REVEALS DS AT E3

U.S.A.

Nintendo has finally unveiled its enigmatic DS, and the technical innovation doesn't stop at simply having two screens.

One screen is touch-sensitive, using either your fingers or an included stylus. You'll be able to send instant messages—and your own drawings—to other DS users using wireless networking capabilities. You also can use the stylus during gameplay, such as aiming your weapon in the DS-exclusive *Metroid* game Nintendo unveiled alongside the system.



Aside from *Metroid*, many Nintendo favorites are making the DS leap, including *Animal Crossing* and *WarioWare Inc. Mario 64X4* is a port of the N64 classic, with added characters—Luigi, Yoshi, and Wario—and a four-player versus mode. An original *Mario* title is also in the works.

DS and its first games will ship inside 2004.

PSP ARRIVES

SONY GETS PORTABLE AT E3

U.S.A.

PSP has arrived. The system stole the show at Sony's E3 press conference, with a slew of games shown for the handheld.

While pricing and exact release date weren't touched on—it's expected in the U.S. by April 1 next year—the company blew out the games.



EA promised at least four launch games, including *Need for Speed: Underground*. We also peeped *Ridge Racer*, *Darkstalkers*, *Dynasty Warriors*, *Hot Shots Golf*, and *Metal Gear* among many others.

XB
PC
PS2
GBA
GC

[BLIPS]

Upright and locked position



If you're looking to make your *Steel Battalion: Line of Contact* experience the ultimate, we recommend looking into Masaya's Steel Armor. This sturdy metal frame will accept your *SB* controller and its pedals, allowing you to really get into that cockpit. Check out m-s-y.com for details, as well as other hot metal products.

Little litigators

Last year it was BMX star Dave Mirra; this year, it's the Olsen twins. The barely legal duo is suing Acclaim for money the company allegedly owes them for all those mall-themed games you never played. When we contacted Acclaim, we were informed that the company refuses to comment on legal matters.

GAMEPORT VITAL GAME INFO, NOW BOARDING...

ARRIVALS COMING SOON

SYSTEM	ETA	TITLE	HOW HOT?
PS2/XB	JUNE	**ORIV3R** Remember not to ask for "Driv-three-R" at the store.	4
PS2/XB	JUNE	**SILENT HILL 4: THE ROOM** Only even-numbered *Silent Hills* are allowed on Xbox.	3
GC	JUNE	**ZELOA: FOUR SWOROS AOVENTURES** If you're out of school, this is a good one.	5
GC/PS2	JULY	**SPLINTER CELL PANOORA TOMORROW** See what Xbox players have been crowing about.	4
PS2/XB	JULY	**COMBAT ELITE: WWII PARATROOPERS** *Hitler's Gate: Dark Alliance*	2
GC/PS2/XB	JULY	**NCAA FOOTBALL 2004** The college kids get a day in the sun.	2
GC/PC/PS2/XB	JULY	**CATWOMAN** Kickin' litter onto four platforms.	2
GC	JULY	**TALES OF SYMPHONIA** Try an RPG to beat the heat.	4
GC	JULY	**PUYO POP FEVER** And it was down to one (platform).	3
PS2	JULY	**ATHENS 2004** We're just assuming you'll have to tap buttons in this one.	2
GBA	JULY	**HAMTARO: RAINBOW RESCUE** Favorite of 6-year-olds and diminutive furries.	2
PS2	JULY	**STREET FIGHTER ANNIV. COLLECTION** *Ken and Ryu Strike Back.*	3
PS2	JULY	**CRIMSON TEARS** File with *Crimson Sea 2* for a Crimson collection.	4
PS2	AUG	**STAR OCEAN: TILL THE ENO OF TIME** It took till the end of time to come out here.	5
PS2/XB	AUG	**NARC** Winners, apparently, *do* use drugs. Or so says Midway.	3
PS2	AUG	**SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: NOCTURNE** In case your summer was too bright.	4

DEPARTURES OUT NOW

SYSTEM	TITLE	GMR SCORE
PS2	**ONIMUSHA 3: OEMON SIEGE** East beats West.	9/10
PS2	**SIREN** I see via dead people.	8/10
PC/PS2/XB	**ALIAS** Adopt one if you're considering buying this game in public.	5/10
PS2	**SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN** The only strain is on our patience.	5/10
PS2	**TRANSFORMERS** Less than meets the eye.	5/10
PS2/XB	**MTX MOTOTRAX** That's a lot of Ms, Ts, and Xs.	8/10
PC	**FAR CRY** Like a tropical vacation, with more gunplay.	7/10
PS2	**OESTRUCTION OERBY ARENAS** For some reason, the British pronounce it "darby."	5/10
PC/PS2/XB	**HITMAN: CONTRACTS** A contract dispute.	6/10
XB	**STEEL BATTALION: LINE OF CONTACT** Not quite the best use of your $250 after all.	7/10
PC/XB	**OEAO MAN'S HANO** 2004 is the year of Westerns, so buy a different one.	4/10
PC	**UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004** More maps than you can shake a rocket launcher at.	8/10
PS2	**SAMURAI WARRIORS** Koei, the Earth-friendly, recycling-oriented publisher.	7/10
PS2	**RESIOENT EVIL OUTBREAK** Online game without chat. Genius.	6/10
PS2/XB	**NBA BALLERS** Bling-a-ling.	8/10
GBA	**SPLINTER CELL PANOORA TOMORROW** More like *Pandora Yesterday*! Zing!	4/10

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RELAUNCH!

1UP.com is already a great resource for your online gaming needs, right? It brings together content from all of your favorite magazines—like *GMR*, *OPM*, *CGW*, *XBN*, and *EGM*—plus hot original stuff and the best news on the Web.

But by the time you read this, you'll notice that 1UP has completely relaunched. It still has the same great staff and the content you love, but the whole site has been rebuilt around a social network by gamers, for gamers. Want to track down an Xbox Live challenger or arrange a trade? Done. Want to read the journals of *GMR* editors and find out what we're up to as we gallivant across the globe in search of hot news? We're on it. Check out all this and more now at the all-new www.1UP.com.

XB
PC
PS2
GC

CLICKS
GO HERE NOW, PILGRIM



SHINING-WORLD.JP

Sega has picked 2004 to relaunch its acclaimed *Shining* series of RPGs. Shining-World.jp is the new official home of everything *Shining* on the Web, including the new *Shining Tears* and *Shining Force* for PS2, which were just announced in Japan.

HALO, GOOD-BYE
NEW GIG FOR BUNGIE FOUNDER
U.S.A.

Founder Alex Seropian left Bungie Software in September of 2002, but he didn't take too long of a vacation. In six months, he opened Wideload Games, and now, a year after that, he's working on an Xbox and PC game that uses the *Halo* engine.

Wideload is set up like a film-production company. Seropian and a small core of senior talent handle engineering, artwork, and design at the higher levels, and when a prototype they create secures a publishing deal, independent talent comes in to finish the game. The idea is to save on the massive expense of maintaining a full team without a guaranteed publishing deal.



Though Wideload's first game has a publisher in place, and about half the team is together so far, the title is not due until late 2005. Whatever it might be, it's not a first-person shooter. "It's an action game," Seropian says, "but we're going in a very different direction from *Halo*."

JOE'S BACK
IT'S A VIEWTIFUL WORLD
JAPAN

Proving that, yes, quirk does have its place in the world, Capcom has announced plans to bring *Viewtiful Joe 2* to GameCube and PS2—along with a port of the original to Sony's platform, with *Devil May Cry* demon hunter Dante in tow. If that's not good enough for you, Joe's sweetie, Sylvia, stars alongside him in the sequel.

Clover Studio, a new independent developer founded by Capcom Japan, will be in charge of these games. It's headed up by irreverent genius Atsushi Inaba—the man behind *VJ* and *Steel Battalion*. Aside from *VJ* and its sequel, Clover's making an original PS2 title called *Okami*, which stars a wolf god and features toon-shaded *Wind Waker*–style graphics with the flair of traditional Japanese inked art.



Expect PS2 to get *VJ* this fall; *VJ2* will hit both PS2 and GC later in the winter. *Okami*'s not currently confirmed for a U.S. release, but wolves rule, so we're hopeful that Capcom USA will see the light.

[BLIPS]

The death of sidetalkin'



Wasting no time, Nokia's already putting out the second generation of the beleaguered N-Gage hardware: the N-Gage QD. It features a more compact design, normal phone orientation, and—mercy be!—the ability to change games without completely disassembling the unit. QD will hit the U.S. in June for $199.

XBOX KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



EVAN SHAMOON

SPORTY SPICE

As of this writing, E3 is merely a few short weeks away. Rumors concerning an agreement between EA and Microsoft over the former's support of Xbox Live have reached a fever pitch. With Microsoft's recent cancellation of its 2005 roster of sports games, the question lingers: Does this make room for EA Sports to enter the Live arena?

It's clear that Microsoft understands the importance of sports games in the American console market: It has published a dozen or so sports games since Xbox's launch, despite the presence of established powerhouses like EA and Sega. It's also clear that it understands the importance of online gaming, particularly in the realm of sports games. Witness its ground-up development of the XSN service, dedicated solely to online sports gaming.

Combine these factors with the fact that Xbox is reaching perhaps its most crucial year yet—a year in which it has the potential to topple PS2 in console sales—and it seems highly unlikely that the company will impair its chances for success by making Sega's 2K5 line its only bastion of online sports. While both companies remain quiet about the matter, don't be surprised if EA and Microsoft have some big news to disclose at E3.

_Evan Shamoon is an editor at Xbox Nation.

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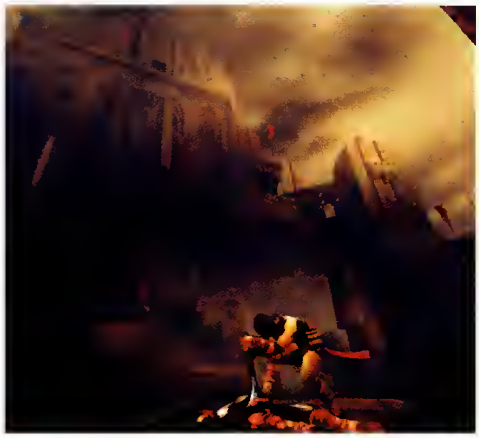
PAINCE OF PEASIA 2 ON ITS WAY

CANADA

Ubisoft has announced that a sequel to last year's highly acclaimed *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* will appear on PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, and PC this fall.

Aiming for a bleaker story and more action-packed gameplay, the game recasts you as the title character. This time, he's on a quest to escape his fate. It seems his death was foreordained, and he's being pursued by a wrathful goddess who wants to make that prophecy come true.

Ubisoft is promising the game's combat system will be revamped, and ranged combat is being added to round it out. Additional combat-oriented wrinkles that powered the first game will also be included. This time around, you explore a dark underworld—a breeding ground for demons. For now, check out these first screenshots and wait for more.







PHANTOM APPEARS

IT'S REALLY REAL THIS TIME. NO. REALLY

U.S.A.

Investigative Internet journalism that painted the Phantom as insubstantial as its name. The arrival of ex-Xboxer Kevin Bachus as head of the company. Infinium Labs has had a strange time getting the Phantom off the ground. But it's finally go time. The company is demoing the Phantom at this year's E3 show, and Bachus is finally explaining exactly what the system is, how it works, and why it's cool.

It may be best to think of the Phantom as a cable box for videogames rather than a modified PC or a console in the traditional sense. Sure, it's a box that hooks up to your television that is full of the guts that run games, but Phantom is about its service—which delivers games digitally to your Phantom box at the touch of a button.

It's not the traditional "gotta have it" game titles you go to the store and buy that will drive Phantom's success. In fact, the product is now the "Phantom Gaming Service"—with the emphasis off the machine itself and on what it does. Whether gamers will pay full price for game downloads—and a monthly fee on top of that—remains to be seen, but the convenience factor can't be denied.



_Above is concept art; photo unavailable at press time

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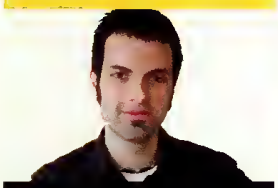
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NINTENDO
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MARK MACDONALD

IN DA CLUB

I don't envy the Japanese—really, I don't. I mean, sure, I used to, back when they got every Nintendo game like nine years before they were translated for America. But these days the turnaround is usually very speedy. Hell, we even get some stuff before they do now, like *Wario World* and all the *Metroid* games—*Advance Wars* never even came out in Japan at all! Plus, it's crowded over there. And expensive. And it's impossible to find good Mexican food.

But now I'm jealous of our friends across the Pacific once again. The reason? Club Nintendo, a kind of frequent-flyer program for games. How it works is kinda like a game in itself: You receive different amounts of points for buying Nintendo games, plus bonus points for filling out surveys, etc. Then you can cash 'em in for all kinds of Nintendo-related goodies. Limited edition GameCube covers, different exclusive GBA SP colors, soundtrack CDs, carrying cases, T-shirts, posters, controllers, I want, I want, I WANT! Oh...sorry.

Anyway, it's a very cool way of both encouraging and rewarding fans. Nintendo of America did something similar for the GameCube *Zelda Collection* disc—here's hoping it implements a more comprehensive program soon.

_Mark MacDonald is executive editor at *Electronic Gaming Monthly*.

[TALENT]

CHRIS VRENNA
SOUNDS LIKE DOOM

Since starting with the music and sound effects for *Quake*—which he did as a member of Nine Inch Nails—Chris Vrenna has written music for *American McGee's Alice*, *Enter the Matrix*, *Area 51*, and *The Sims 2*. But it's his work on *Doom 3* that's got him (and us) really excited.

GMR: How did you go from doing *Quake* with Nine Inch Nails to doing *Doom 3* on your own?

CV: A couple years after I left Nine Inch Nails, I got a call from American McGee, who was our point guy at Id when we did *Quake*. He wanted me to do the music for his game *Alice*, and doing it was so fun that I started looking for more games to do.

GMR: How much of a game do you get to see before you start?

CV: Sometimes not very much at all, and other times, I'll see complete levels. Most people want you to be inspired by the way the game looks, so I usually get something rough to play.

GMR: Do you also write stuff specifically if you're doing only one song for a game?

CV: Yeah, and I usually have to because every game has some rule or limitation you have to keep in mind. Like for *Enter the Matrix*, the song had to be something that could be chopped into two- or four-bar chunks.

GMR: Are there any kinds of games that you're more into scoring?

CV: Well, my love is always anything dark, so I love sci-fi and horror games. Though my favorites to play are first-person shooters because they make me feel like I'm in the game.

GMR: So you must've been psyched to get the *Doom 3* gig. But wasn't your old Nine Inch Nails mate, Trent Reznor, supposed to do it?

CV: He was. I don't know what happened with that, to be honest. I think it was just an issue of the amount of work versus time, and he had to do a new Nine Inch Nails album at some point.

GMR: You also record music under the name Tweaker. Are any of the songs on your new album, *2 a.m. Wakeup Call*, inspired by your videogame work?

CV: I can't think of anything specific, but I'd have to say absolutely. And vice versa. Just last week, we were working on stuff for *Tabula Rasa* and we hit something cool on the keyboard, and I was like, "Hold on a second, that's a Tweaker song."



_Photo by Jonathan Rach

PLAYSTATION
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JOHN DAVISON

GT-WHY?

Why don't we know anything about *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas* yet? If it's coming out in October, shouldn't we know more by now? As this is the fifth full game in the series, there's a definite danger of *GTA* suffering from what is commonly referred to as "the *Tomb Raider* effect."

How many times can a game be sequeled before it gets old? For *TR*, it was just twice, indicating some significant lunacy concerning the four subsequent releases.

For *GTA*, let's hope all the rumors are true and it is indeed as significant a game as the last two.

There's talk of the hottest physics technology being used, possibly Havok (which is turning up everywhere from *Astro Boy* to *Mercenaries*), so we can expect everything to bounce around the environment when blown up and characters to be rag-dolling like it's going out of fashion.

The script reading for the casting call was a scene from *Colors*, which leads us to believe the new game is a little more contemporary than *Vice City*. There's also talk of online modes. What does this mean? Downloads, social stuff, mods, and more, along with some kind of "make your own character" mode that might use the EyeToy.

So there you go. Sounds awesome, doesn't it?

_John Davison is editor-in-chief of the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*.

XB
PC
PS2
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GC

PC KNOWLEDGE
THEY KNOW STUFF SO YOU DON'T HAVE TO!



JEFF GREEN

I HATE E3

So, by the time you read this, I and all the other schlemiels who write for this magazine will have gone to the annual E3 show in L.A. And all I can say to that: Thank freakin' jeebus it's over.

As I write this in late April, the convention is still a week away, but I'm sick of it already. It hasn't helped that I've been attending this thing since the very beginning. But at the risk of sounding like that cranky old guy on the back page, I gotta say, this show is just getting worse and worse.

Why? It's not like the games are worse. They're not. They're better than ever. And this year's show should have some exciting PC titles, like *Half-Life 2*, and also a few new surprises, like a brand-new, top-secret, scary-as-heck shooter from Monolith (*Tron 2.0, NOLF*) that looks utterly amazing.

No, it's not the games I hate. It's the way the show has morphed into a beauty contest, with every game company frantically trying to win the dumb "best of E3" awards—as if those mean anything. Folks, these are all unfinished games—some are barely in production. It's all hype. All smoke and mirrors. Enjoy the previews. But don't take this stuff seriously. Don't believe me? Here's three words for you: *Duke Nukem Forever.*

_Jeff Green is editor-in-chief of *Computer Gaming World* magazine.

GMR CHARTS

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TOP-SELLING GAMES FOR EVERY SYSTEM FOR APRIL '04

TOP 10 ALL FORMATS

RANK	TITLE	FORMAT	SCORE
01	**FIGHT NIGHT 2004** — Millions of beatdowns already administered.	PS2	9
02	**FIGHT NIGHT 2004** — Proving that everyone likes a good fight.	XB	9
03	**NBA BALLERS** — High sales: bling, bling, bling.	PS2	8
04	**CITY OF HEROES** — Masses upon masses of men in tights.	PC	NR
05	**SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW** — Sneaking into the top 10 again.	XB	9
06	**RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK** — I have no headset and I must scream.	PS2	6
07	**NBA BALLERS** — Next year: *MLB Batters, NFL, er, Pointy Ballers?*	XB	9
08	**MVP BASEBALL 2004** — Someone's paying attention to the scores.	PS2	9
09	**HITMAN: CONTRACTS** — One way or another, the game gets bought.	XB	6
10	**POKÉMON COLOSSEUM** — They're going to run out of synonyms for "stadium" soon.	GC	8

*Denotes equivalent score by sister publication, *Computer Gaming World*
NR=Not Reviewed

PS2 TOP 10

		SCORE
01	FIGHT NIGHT 2004	9
02	NBA BALLERS	8
03	RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK	6
04	MVP BASEBALL 2004	9
05	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	6
06	ONIMUSHA 3: DEMON SIEGE	9
07	ALL-STAR BASEBALL 2005	7
08	FINAL FANTASY XI	9
09	MLB 2005	7
10	RAINBOW SIX 3	8

XBOX TOP 10

		SCORE
01	FIGHT NIGHT 2004	9
02	SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW	9
03	NBA BALLERS	8
04	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	6
05	ESPN MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL	7
06	TOCA RACE DRIVER 2	8
07	MVP BASEBALL 2004	9
08	NINJA GAIDEN	9
09	YU-GI-OH!: THE DAWN OF DESTINY	NR
10	MANHUNT	4

PC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	CITY OF HEROES	NR
02	LINEAGE II	NR
03	FAR CRY	7
04	BATTLEFIELD VIETNAM	9
05	PAINKILLER	8
06	UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004	8
07	SACRED	7*
08	COUNTER-STRIKE: CONDITION ZERO	5
09	HITMAN: CONTRACTS	6
10	RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS	8

GBA TOP 10

		SCORE
01	SUPER MARIO ADVANCE 4: SUPER MARIO BROS. 3	9
02	METROID ZERO MISSION	9
03	POKÉMON SAPPHIRE	7
04	MARIO & LUIGI: SUPERSTAR SAGA	9
05	HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN	8
06	YU-GI-OH!: WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2004	NR
07	POKÉMON RUBY	7
08	SHINING SOUL II	7
09	SONIC BATTLE	NR
10	FIRE EMBLEM	8

GC TOP 10

		SCORE
01	POKÉMON COLOSSEUM	8
02	HARVEST MOON: A WONDERFUL LIFE	8
03	WARIOWARE INC.: MEGA PARTY GAMES	8
04	METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES	9
05	MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!	10
06	NBA STREET VOL. 2	9
07	SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE	9
08	MVP BASEBALL 2004	9
09	FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES	8
10	SONIC HEROES	7

INTERNATIONAL REPORT

PS2

POPOLOPOLY

I DON'T WANNA GAOW UP, I'M A POPOLOCAOIS KID

JAPAN







→ Prince Pinon is again the central figure in the latest iteration in the series, and yes, his pet dragon Papu rides on his head the whole time.

To American eyes, Nintendo's latest *Legend of Zelda* looked like Rankin-Bass stop-motion animation. The Japanese, on the other hand, probably thought it looked like *Popolocrois*. *Wind Waker*'s childlike cel-shaded style likely owes a little inspiration to this little-known RPG series—little-known outside Japan, anyway.

In Japan, it's been popular through five installments, three on PlayStation and two for PS2. The latest, *Tsuki no Okite no Bouken*, or "great adventure of the moon's law," uses its new hardware to draw an expansive cartoon world, bigger and more detailed than 2002's much-delayed *Hajimari no Bouken*.

Prince Pinon of the Popolocrois Kingdom once again takes center stage, leading his friends Luna and Marco (and many other characters) around the world for another globe-spanning adventure. If the world and the cast are bigger, though, the style of the games hasn't changed—*Popolocrois* is still a cute, charming, "kiddie" (if you will) adventure, aimed at all ages and then some.

Popolocrois appeared around the time when the rest of the RPG field "grew up." When *Final Fantasy* started getting serious and games like *Xenogears* began drawing a cult following, an audience for these bigheaded kid RPGs seemed to spring up at the same time. The American game market could use some of that same balance, but to date, no publisher has taken the chance. Let's hope someone does.











PS2

→ Ever wanted to get revenge on a surly gas station attendant? Maybe this screenshot, which depicts our youthful prince (bottom right corner) rolling toward a hapless petrol station, will tickle your fancy. Apparently, the King is amused, because he's preparing (at left) to turn that clump into a new star.

I WANNA BE A BALLER

SPACE ODDITY

JAPAN

Japan has a reputation for churning out quirky games. If you surf the Web, you can find dozens in seconds, catering to every bizarre fanboy perversion. But focusing on the strangeness ignores a crucial question: Are these games *good*? Well, the 2004 poster child for quirk with quality is Namco's *Katamari Damacy*.

With a title that roughly translates to "clump of soul," the game puts you in the shoes of a hapless young prince whose father, the King of the Great Cosmo, accidentally destroyed the stars in the sky while carousing drunkenly through the heavens. To make amends, he's hooked you up with a ball that makes anything and everything stick to it, so you can roll up huge clumps of matter that he can make into new stars.

Starting small, you'll pick up items such as thumbtacks, matches, and dice. As your clump gets bigger and badder, you'll be able to take on mice, food, game consoles, and even people, buildings, bridges, and boats. By the end of the game, you'll be picking up entire stadiums, high-rises, and islands. The game's control is simple (roll your ball using the analog sticks) but solid, and it rewards finesse. When you lose, it's your fault, not the game's.

What makes *KD* so cool is its offbeat style. The King's bizarre and hilarious (Japanese) dialogue, the blocky pastel graphics, the humorous cut-scenes, and the diverse postpop soundtrack make it fresh every time you play. Collecting doodads is surprisingly cool, given the developers' attention to variety and detail—and the game keeps track of everything you grab. There's even a two-player mode to keep the party jumpin'. Namco USA, you feeling it? We are.

GAMEPLANNER | JUNE 2004

ALL RELEASE DATES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE. SO IT'S NOT OUR FAULT!

THE SUMMER WIND...CAME BLOWIN' IN...FROM ACROSS THE SEA...

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THUASDAY	FAIDAY	SATUADAY
Some people are named April, May, or June. Why don't people name their kids February? Think about it: *February McGee*. Now that's a name.		01 *MTV Music Generator 3* (PS2), *The Chronicles of Riddick* (XB), *Front Mission 4* (PS2), *Thief: Deadly Shadows* (PC, XB), *Crash Bandicoot Purple* (GBA), and *Spyro Orange* (GBA) are out today.	02	03	04 *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* opens today. If you don't know what that is by now, well, we can't help you.	05
06	07 *Shellshock: Nam '67* (PC, PS2, XB), *Legend of Zelda. Four Swords* (GC), and the Game Boy Classic line featuring *Super Mario Bros., Ice Climber*, and *The Legend of Zelda*—get 'em.	08 Out now: *Ribbit King* (GC, PS2), *Shining Force: Resurrection of the Dark Dragon* (GBA), *Smash Court Tennis 2* (PS2), *Sudeki* (XB), and *Full Spectrum Warrior* (XB).	09		11 *The Chronicles of Riddick* starts today, which means we're going to have to rent *Pitch Black* so we know what the hell is going on.	12
13	14 Midway's promising *Psi-Ops: The Mindgate Conspiracy* is now shipping for PlayStation 2 and Xbox. Wrap your mind around *that*.	15 *Rainbow Six 3* is out for GameCube, if anyone still cares.	16	17	18 Opening today is *The Terminal*, which is about a man who is forced to live in an airport. It's based on a real story, unlike Ben Stiller's *Dodgeball: A True Underdog Story*.	19
21 *Mario Golf: Advance Tour* (GBA), *MLB Slugfest: Loaded* (XB), and *Driver 3* (PS2, XB). The three best things about summertime: golf, baseball, and bloody street crime.	22	23	24 Go outside.	25	26	
27	28 *Mega Man Battle Network 4* (GBA), *Spider-Man: The Movie 2* (GBA, GC, PC, PS2, XB), and lo and behold, the redesigned N-Gage QD are all available today.	29 Today's PS2 releases include *Way of the Samurai 2*, *Karaoke Revolution Vol. 2*, and *Galactic Wrestling: Featuring Ultimate Muscle*.	30		Anyone else find it insulting that ABC's Motown 45th Anniversary show featured Nick Lachey and the Backstreet Boys? Anyone?	

THE FINE-TUNING WILL BE COMPLETE THIS WINTER.

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NEXT



WARNING! HAZARDOUS MATERIAL

Here at *GMR*, we preview games a little differently. To ensure that our previews are as relevant as possible, we feature only titles that will be released within six months. We also record our level of excitement about each game with cool little flames. Previews are not reviews—they're merely a guide as to how good a game in progress is looking. They're snapshots. If we're not very excited about a game, it gets one or two flames. If we're taking a wait-and-see attitude, expect to see three flames. Over and above that, you can bet we're pretty excited. It's our duty to tell you what we think at every stage of a game's development cycle—positive, negative, or somewhere in between.

INCOMING GAMES PREVIEWED

PREVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

ARMORED CORE: NEXUS	PS2	042
CRIMSON TEARS	PS2	062
DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY	GC/PS2/XB	064
DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA: AVATAR TUNER	PS2	040
FINAL FANTASY XI: CHAINS OF PROMATHIA	PS2	066
THE GETAWAY 2	PS2	059
GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX	PS2	046
KARAOKE REVOLUTION VOLUME 2	PS2	044
MECHASSAULT 2	XB	036
PAPER MARIO 2	GC	058
THE RED STAR	PS2/XB	052
RIBBIT KING	GC/PS2	044
RISE OF THE KASAI	PS2	060
ROME: TOTAL WAR	PC	056
SPIDER-MAN 2	GC/PS2/XB	065
SPY FICTION	PS2	054
STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME	PS2	033
STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION	PS2	061



RELEASE | AUGUST

STAR OCEAN: TILL THE END OF TIME

ROLE-PLAYING GAME. WITH EMPHASIS ON THE GAME

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER SQUARE ENIX DEVELOPER TRI-ACE



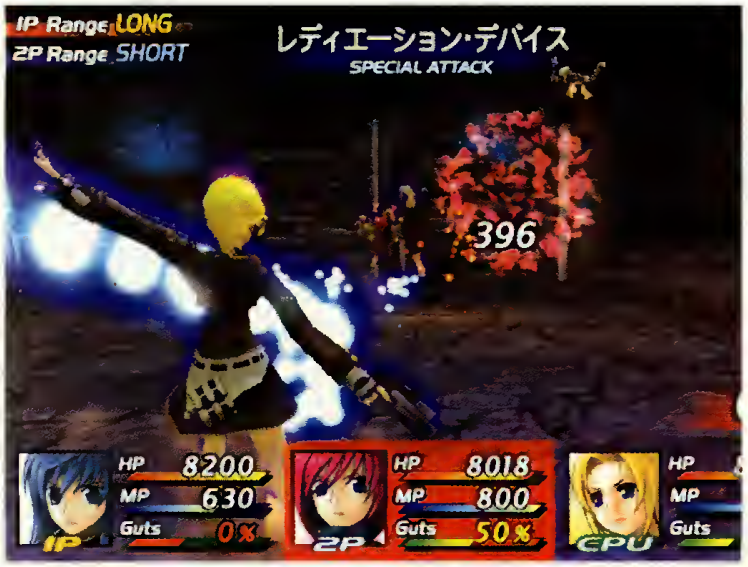
None of its games have many visual cues in common—the cast and world of *Star Ocean* don't bear much resemblance to those in *Valkyrie Profile*—but Tri-Ace games always have telltale characteristics. Hyperactive battle system? Check. Open-ended character development? Check. Inexplicably complex yet deeply compelling cooking system? Check, check, check.

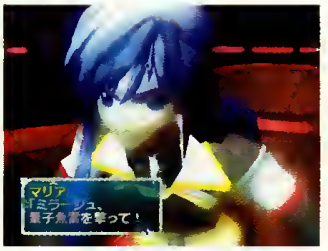
Star Ocean: Till the End of Time is a new step for the developer—its first completely real-time 3D game—and at first glance, it doesn't make the transition completely smoothly. Its character design seems like a bit of a disappointment—the relatively low detail of its animation-inspired cast doesn't seem like much after *Valkyrie Profile*'s gorgeous artwork. Deeper into the game, though, a little character detail seems like a more than fair trade for such an effective combat system.

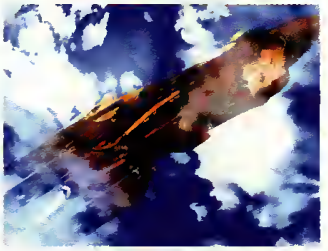
Till the End of Time has the action of a *Tales* game and the teamwork found in *Valkyrie Profile*. Both of those systems force some limitations on movement, though, and the new *Star Ocean* has hardly any limitations at all. You have complete control over any member of the three-character party and the ability to move them in real time around the 3D battlefields. That opens up all kinds of opportunities for juggling targets, pushing them around, and smashing them with team attacks.

Off the battlefield, you have plenty of opportunities to kit the party out with new skills. Combat and character development are closely meshed together—each character has a basic set of abilities to begin with and a partially fixed tree of skills that arrives with experience, but you have the freedom to choose new abilities as well. Special items grant new skills and groups of "symbology" spells to any character, broadening their options or moving them further toward a specific purpose.

A fighter like lead character Fayt Linegod can learn new combat skills to become even more deadly or acquire a set of support spells to play a more flexible role. At the same time, a character with a knack for magic









→ The Tri-Ace games have always been a little offbeat but top-notch. Good luck finding a copy of *Valkyrie Profile* these days. That said, we recommend you get the jump on the new *Star Ocean* as soon as it hits the starting gates. Hands-on time suggests this will be your best role-playing option this summer.





SLAP STICK

Till the End of Time, like every Tri-Ace game, features the eclectic compositions of Motoi Sakuraba. A veteran of Wolf Team's 16-bit titles (from *Arcus Odyssey* to *Earnest Evans*), he went on to compose for Namco's *Tales* series, *Star Ocean*, and *Valkyrie Profile*. He's not your usual RPG composer—in between more traditional accompaniments, he'll just as often break into classically overwrought prog-rock stylings. Sakuraba has also branched out beyond composition, working with new development company Tri-Crescendo and putting on his own live *Star Ocean* and *Valkyrie Profile* concert in Tokyo last year.



PS2

and support skills, like heroine Sophia Esteed, can learn enough combat and defensive abilities to survive without hanging out in the background. The direction a character's development takes naturally defines the strategy for using them in combat, as well as the way the rest of the party evolves.

This makes *Star Ocean* sound heavy on the number crunching, but it's surprising how effortless the system feels in practice. Combat itself is easy to learn; the attack commands are simple and clearly defined. The only variables are range and pressure on the attack buttons, but combined with the selection of symbology options, there are enough options available for a compelling battle.

Combat is *fun* in this game, which is hard to say for some RPGs, and it moves quickly enough to keep from breaking up the flow of solving puzzles in a dungeon or moving through the story. In the early going, *Till the End of Time* has few of the pacing problems in some of Tri-Ace's earlier games. *Valkyrie Profile* and *Star Ocean: The Second Story* both kicked off with interminable noninteractive cinematics, while *Till the End of Time* has the sense to tell the story as it goes along. Conversations, combat, and puzzles alternate smoothly to keep the opening movements from dragging.

Square and Monolith Soft have pretty well locked up the cinematic end of the PlayStation 2 RPG market, but that's left plenty of open space on the gameplay-driven end of the spectrum. *Till the End of Time* promises to carve out a respectable chunk of that territory and hold its own with the other epics on the market—its engine can draw an impressive environment, including everything from medieval castles to massive spacecraft, and the current localization is up to Square's excellent standards. If you don't want the game left out of your roleplaying, this looks like the only RPG you'll need this year.

GMR SAYS → Possibly the hottest ticket in role-playing games this year.

→ HOW HOT... 🔥🔥🔥🔥🔥

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RELEASE | WINTER

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SYSTEM XB PUBLISHER MICROSOFT DEVELOPER DAY 1 STUDIOS

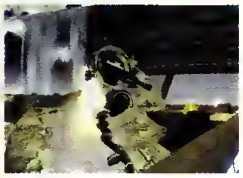




→ The battle armor's mortar weapon takes real skill to use, but the impact is huge. The VTOL can drop cluster bombs that can turn the tides of battle in a hurry. All the weapons have new special effects and often give a good indication of the direction they are fired from.









The first *MechAssault* was something of a surprise: The console adaptation of the PC game based on the pen-and-paper FASA RPG turned into the hit of Xbox Live.

MechAssault 2 looks to expand on that success by broadening the gameplay experience and "giving [players] a closer look at the rich fiction of the *Battletech* world," says developer Day 1's president and CEO Denny Thorley. *MA* was long on mission structure and gameplay, but fairly short on story—a shame given the richness of the *Battletech* world. Several new characters are being introduced in *MA2*, and players will have a better opportunity to understand how their success in the game influences the events in the story line.

But beyond story, the biggest change to *MA2*'s gameplay is the player's ability to get out of his or her mech and either go around on foot or in new personal armor suits. The game is also more tactical now, allowing players to change tactics—and vehicles—in the middle of a fight. For example, the VTOL can pick up a tank, use it as a shield to protect itself, and move it to high ground that's ordinarily inaccessible to the tank pilot. "This is a great way to ambush an enemy, because few players expect to get hit from a tank from inaccessible terrain," Thorley explains.

Players can risk trying to jack an enemy mech or play more of a stealth role and opportunistically pound on the enemy. "If you recognize the enemy's tactics, there is likely an effective countermeasure that can be executed with the change of vehicle or working cooperatively with your team members," Thorley says.

He also says that *MA2* is intended to be the poster child for Live 3.0 when it's released. When we pressed for more details, we ran into the unmovable rock that is a Microsoft NDA, but Thorley did make one broad hint: "One thing's for sure...there will be more players in each game."

GMR SAYS → *MechAssault 2* satisfies our destructive instincts in a wholesomely robotic way

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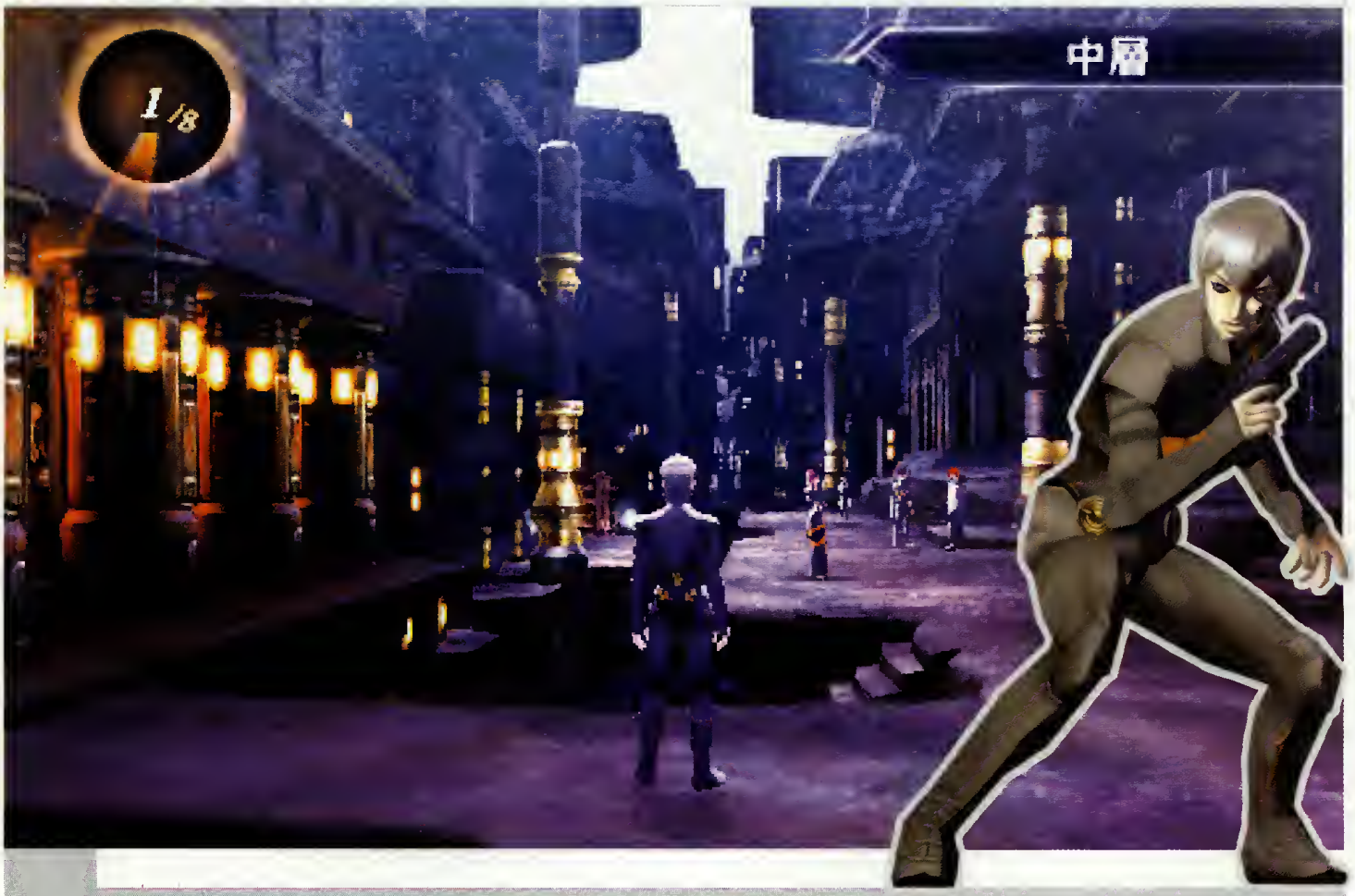
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RELEASE | WINTER

DIGITAL DEVIL SAGA: AVATAR TUNER

EMBRACE YOUR INNER DEMON

☐SYSTEM PS2 ☐PUBLISHER ATLUS ☐DEVELOPER ATLUS



PS2

As the RPG market matures, it's slowly changing to accommodate the shift in our tastes. Two months ago, we brought you the first news of the U.S. release of *Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne*, a postapocalyptic RPG filled with demons and graced with a branching story line. While the series may be new to gamers in the States, it's old news in Japan.

Its developer, Atlus, is already hard at work on the next evolution of the series, one that blends the dark chic of *SMT* with the embellished creativity of a *Final Fantasy* title. It's known as *Digital Devil Saga: Avatar Tuner*. Atlus is hoping that this mix will suck new gamers into the *SMT* universe, and from what we've seen so far, that's more plausible than you may think.

The game opens with a battle-scarred landscape. Young guerrilla warriors battle over a strange egg-shaped machine—its purpose is mysterious, but in this world, everything is worth fighting over. If you walked into the room at this point, the scenes of pitched battles might make you might think the game is a shooter...but things get weird when the "pod" shoots out rays of light that transfigure the human combatants into demons who immediately crush and devour their opponents.

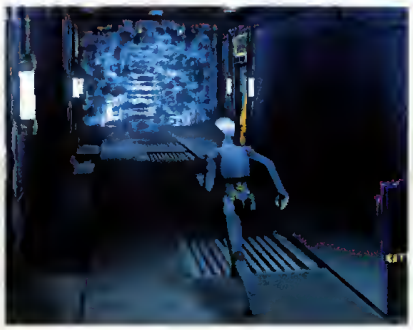
No, this isn't another bubbly anime-style RPG. Bleak and surreal, it follows the adventures of the new style of characters that have gained prominence as gamers mature: dark heroes. With striking visuals that are a match for the disturbing themes, *DDS* strives to offer an RPG experience unlike any other. The developers have chosen to work with Ichiro Itano (who helped create the anime classic *Macross Plus*) to bring a cinematic edge to the game in an attempt to woo gamers hungry for story-driven RPGs like *Xenosaga*.

As a mysterious lad named Serf, you—along with your other demon-infested battle comrades—strive to become the strongest warrior and











→ The world of *Digital Devil Saga* looks unlike any other game around—except for the team's other game this year, *Shin Megami Tensei III: Nocturne*. The stunning and bizarre designs of artist Kazuma Kaneko, who handles both character and monster art, are what gives these games their visual edge.

enter Nirvana. Sera, a girl who was born from the destruction in the beginning of the game, tempers the dark powers of your demonic allies with her tranquility. As with many RPG heroines, her origins are mysterious and her visage serene. The game is filled with Eastern religious iconography, but the skewed tone brings out the fantastical elements in these settings.

DDS follows the traditional paths RPG gamers have come to expect: exploration and battle. Featuring an evolved version of the battle system that powers *Nocturne*, the game's fights are quick and visually arresting. Immediately upon entering battle, you transform to your demon self, but you can switch back and forth at will, fighting with projectile weapons as a human. Multicharacter combo attacks liven things up, and as a demon, you can devour your enemies and gain energy and skills from them.

Sure, it's gruesome, but that's the grim core of this world: a constant battle of survival, with human emotions and animal instincts at war. It's an unusual approach for an RPG, which is what makes it so compelling. Later this year, we'll find out if roleplaying is ready for the dark makeover that's swept through all other genres during this generation.

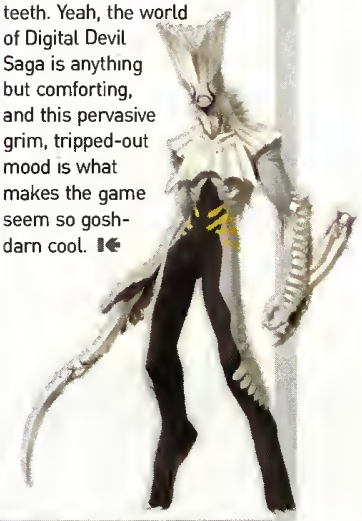
GMR SAYS → This is the darkest, strangest RPG we'll see on PS2, period.

→ HOW HOT...

CHEW AND SWALLOW

See that guy posing on the left-hand page and that crazy demon down below? They're actually the same dude: Serf, the game's main character. He's part of a group of fighters called Embryon who activates a device known as the "pod"—beams of light shoot out of it and transfigure the combatants.

When in human form, each fighter is marked with a tattoo suggestive of his or her alter ego. Serf may look weird as a demon, but his female cohort's breasts have teeth. Yeah, the world of Digital Devil Saga is anything but comforting, and this pervasive grim, tripped-out mood is what makes the game seem so gosh-darn cool.





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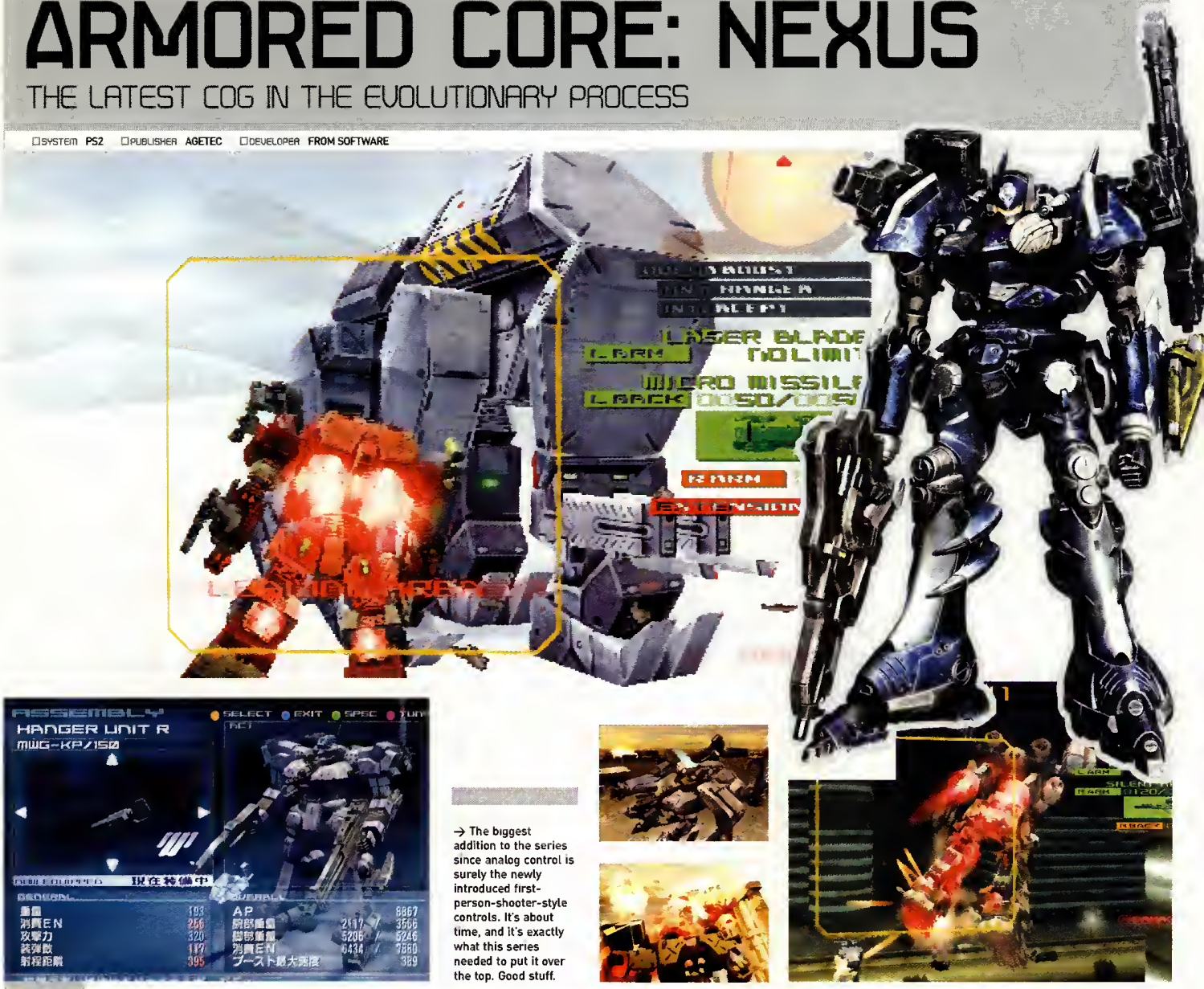
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ARMORED CORE: NEXUS

THE LATEST COG IN THE EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER AGETEC DEVELOPER FROM SOFTWARE



→ The biggest addition to the series since analog control is surely the newly introduced first-person-shooter-style controls. It's about time, and it's exactly what this series needed to put it over the top. Good stuff.

The *Armored Core* series is one of those franchises that masses of people consistently buy every version of, yet a large group of game fans has no idea why (see *Dynasty Warriors*). The basic answer is that these games offer a certain amount of depth and customization over time, so the more hours you put into them, the more you get out of them.

Armored Core: Nexus retains that depth but tosses in a few significant features to keep things fresh. For all of those fans disappointed with the old-school *Armored Core* controls, *Nexus* gets that out of the way right up front with dual-analog support. Now the game feels a bit more like a first-person shooter, with movement on the left analog stick and camera control on the right stick. Like the *Resident Evil* games, the old setup came along before the dual analog sticks became a standard, so it's good to see the games catching up to the technology in their latest versions.

Other new features include a further evolution of the mech upgrade system, with tons of parts to buy and a heavier emphasis on graphical presentation in the missions. It's not stuff that'll draw in the skeptics, but it's certainly a decent new feature list for fans accustomed to small upgrades. To take advantage of these new features, *Nexus* comes packed with a second disk featuring remade versions of old *Armored Core* levels (and tons of hidden extras like concept art), so fans who like the new presentation and controls can go back to some of their favorite levels and get the best of both worlds. Plus, there will be LAN play for those who can utilize it.

With all this content, *Nexus* has a good shot at becoming the definitive *Armored Core* experience, so we hope there aren't any odd gameplay balance problems that are always possible in a game featuring this much customization.

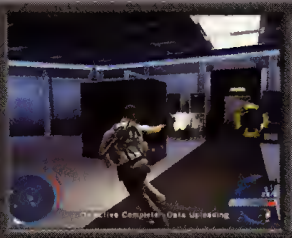
GMA SAYS → Tough call until we put in 40 hours, but it looks promising.

→ HOW HOT...

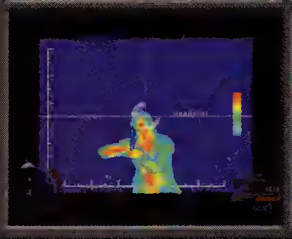
syphon filter
THE OMEGA STRAIN



▲ PLACE HAND HERE ▲









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REPORT TO: GABE LOGAN, I.P.C.A COMMA[illegible] IN CHIEF.

OBJECTIVE: STOP OMEGA STRAIN VIRUS A[illegible] WHO CONTROL IT.

ARSENAL: 100+ HIGH[illegible] WEAPONS[illegible] GUN, DSC-1 THERMAL SN[illegible] RIFLE CH 9 M[illegible] PISTOL SL[illegible] GRENADE.

MISSION DIRECTIVES: ELIMINATE ALL ENEMY[illegible] OF DEADLY MUTATING VIRUS. ANY INF[illegible] CLASSIFIED AS YOU WILL BE ENGAG[illegible] SUCCESS OF THIS GLOBAL COU[illegible]

PRIORITY: URGENT

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PS2

GC

RELEASE | JULY

KARAOKE REVOLUTION 2

SING LOUD, SING PROUD

☐SYSTEM PS2 ☐PUBLISHER KONAMI ☐DEVELOPER HARMONIX

Rev up those vocal chords—the hands-down best karaoke game of 2003 is getting a sequel this summer. *Karaoke Revolution Volume 2* works the same as before: Players use the PS2 headset to sing along with the game while they are scored on pitch and rhythm. Rather than just an amusing PS2 karaoke machine, *Karaoke Revolution* is an actual game that you can get better at and beat. Fortunately for those not blessed with good pipes, the game can't discern vocal quality, so you can still sing badly and do well at the game.

New this go-round is a medley mode, in which you pick three songs and sing successive clips, and quick-play mode, a multiplayer game that lets people jump into the game when the mood hits and sing one song. There are also three new venues to perform in: a garage, HMX Records, and the Wagon Wheel (perfect for "Sweet Home Alabama"). Naturally, there are some new characters and new unlockables as well. But the best reason to pick up *Volume 2*, of course, is for the new songs.

Konami has stuck with the something-for-everyone formula by including a mixed bag of dance, pop, R&B, and rock, from "I've Got You Under My Skin" to "Rock and Roll All Night." Those who sang themselves hoarse with the original *Karaoke Revolution* have a whole new repertoire of 35 songs to entertain and annoy their friends with.

GMR SAYS → Plan ahead—get those earplugs ready! Definitely the best party game of the summer

→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | JUNE

RIBBIT KING

FROGGY GOES A-GOLFING

☐SYSTEM GC/PS2 ☐PUBLISHER BANDAI ☐DEVELOPER KEROKEROKING

In an age when game concepts get chosen by committee, with marketing and sales weasels having more say than the guys in jeans actually making the thing, it's almost refreshing to see something as unabashedly wacky as *Ribbit King* hit the States. In fact, "wacky" seems almost too puny a word to describe the awe-inspiring pastel shades of weird Bandai has painted this game with. The only way it could be stranger is if 50 Cent were involved somehow.

The very premise of *Ribbit King* is enough to make grandmothers roll their eyes in derision. This is a simulation of frolf—yes, *frolf*, the sport of young 20-something space aliens across the universe (they've been hiding it from us Earthlings until now). Frolf is something like golf, except instead of pummeling balls with sticks, you're whacking frogs with hammers. It's quite a sight. Away they fly, arcing gracefully through the air toward the hole...and hopefully not into a tree, as bashing your partner into one curtails your range in later shots.

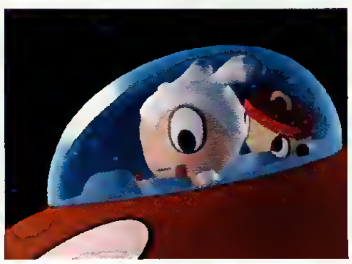
The rules of frolf are a bit different from the sport that brought you Tiger Woods and *Dorf on Golf*. Every hole in *Ribbit King* is filled with gimmicks—tubes, trampolines, or bubbles floating in the air. Hammering your frog into these gimmicks scores points, and the object is to score more than your opponent before "frogging in" (i.e., getting into the hole). The result is a game with a hefty amount of strategy to go with its loony premise—you'll need to plot your way around each frolf course carefully to set off as many gimmicks as possible within your given stroke limit. It's hard to picture a game that features sentient picnic baskets and cave pandas as strategic, yes, but that's how it plays. Really.

GMR SAYS → More fun than you might think. Good for fans of *Animal Crossing*

→ HOW HOT...









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RELEASE | NOVEMBER

GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX

DO PEOPLE LOVE MACHINES IN A.D. 2004?

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER BANDAI GAMES DEVELOPER CAVIA



PS2

***Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* greatly benefits from its source material. Its cyborg heroes are heavily armed, extremely resourceful, and completely above the law. They have their own pet armored tanks for the rough stuff, and they look good, too, designed by Masamune Shirow in his internationally popular mid-'90s comic creation. In other words, this license should offer an un-screw-up-able premise for an action game.**

Admittedly, Cavia could muff it anyhow. The developer of the PS2 *Stand Alone Complex* game (picked up for North American release by Bandai) didn't debut so smoothly with its first PS2 game, *Drakengard*. Individual staff members have better track records than that, though, and time remains between the Japanese release and its North American debut this November.

Jumping Flash! developer Exact neatly sidestepped the stars of the show when it made the famous *Ghost in the Shell* PlayStation game. The human (or at least part-human) protagonists sat in the background while the Fuchikoma tanks took center stage. *Stand Alone Complex* takes on the harder task of giving life to the main characters, particularly Major Motoko Kusanagi.

Even if you've only seen the *Ghost in the Shell* movie (to which *Stand Alone Complex* bears a middling resemblance at best), it should be clear that adapting the major to a videogame control scheme is a pretty complex task. The first surprise in the game, then, is how much of her repertoire is available to the player. Guns and grenades? Plenty of both. Hand-to-hand combat? Simple and deadly. Inhuman agility? She springs from walls easily. Cyber-brain hacking? At the touch of a button.

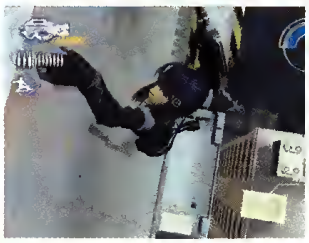
In fact, the Japanese version has problems when the major can do too much for the interface to handle. R1 is an all-purpose action button. When it's not used to initiate interaction with objects in the environment (switches,











→ *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex*'s less stealthy segments feature Batou, Kusanagi's right-hand man. Batou prefers to handle things with heavy ammo. A man after our own hearts.

ladders, computer terminals), it launches the major around the battlefield with acrobatic dodge maneuvers. The problem is, sometimes it does the latter when you want the former. Try to climb a ladder when she's not close enough, and you might make Kusanagi execute a perfect twisting salchow off a catwalk five stories up.

At least she makes a great impression on her way out. The 3D heroine is very well animated, and the game shows her off with slow-motion and close-up camera cuts. Her sidekick Batou is also playable in some levels, and though he doesn't have quite the same mobility or style, he makes up for it with personality and an excess of firepower.

It's primarily Major Kusanagi's show, though. She's the one who can spring from walls to high heights and swipe passwords to hack the bad guys' brains. This leads to some clever puzzles, in which the "key" to unlock the next "door" is a soul she can steal. One early level is completely covered with snipers ensconced in towers the major can't reach. The solution? Cybernetically dominate a sniper and clear the entire level of guards.

A versatile videogame heroine, then, and your dream girl besides—if you happen to be into that sort of thing. We'll see if *Stand Alone Complex* treats her right this November.

GMA SAYS → This will be the ghost in our machine when we play it this fall in North America

→ HOW HOT...

YOU SAY FUCHI, I SAY TACHI



While Section Nine's cute robot tanks aren't the sole focus of *Stand Alone Complex* (as in the PlayStation *Ghost in the Shell* game), they do make cameo appearances in key sequences as well as the deathmatch mode. For whatever reason, the *SAC* version of Shirow's world calls them "Tachikomas," instead of "Fuchikomas," the name they were given in the original comic book. Maybe it's to give them a more aggressive edge—"tachi" can mean "sword" in Japanese—although their childlike artificial intelligence still has a pretty goofy sense of humor.

PS2

GHOST IN THE SHELL: STAND ALONE COMPLEX—ANIMATED

THE ANIME HITS HOME LIKE A HOLLOWPOINT—ON DVD THIS SUMMER

The *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* PS2 game is based on a Japanese TV series. The heritage of the source material isn't quite that simple, but it's easier to understand if you see it for yourself, something that will be possible this July when Manga Video releases the first volume of the 26-episode *Stand Alone Complex* series on DVD. If you're already a fan of Japanese animation, it's probably high on your shopping list. If you're not, it's a fine place to start.

"People love machines in 2029 A.D.," said the *Ghost* movie's promotional tagline. *Stand Alone Complex* skips ahead to 2030, but otherwise, it's a similar world.

"I tried to keep everything continuous from the comic, but I didn't want to make it too futuristic," says director Kenji Kamiyama. "It's more contemporary, more current with today's society."

The future, in other words, is like today, only more so. Computers are still everywhere, but they're inside your head now—the "ghosts" of the title are the souls that can download themselves into the "shell" of a new cyborg brain. Big Brother is still watching you, but he's better at it, spying everywhere from street corners to satellites in high orbit. Which doesn't stop crime, but now it's more complicated, with secret police death squads and an invisible cyborg hacker called the Laughing Man. Also, guns will be much bigger in the future.

The biggest guns belong to Public Safety Section Nine, a police force with a loosely defined mandate to fight cybernetic terrorism. There's the



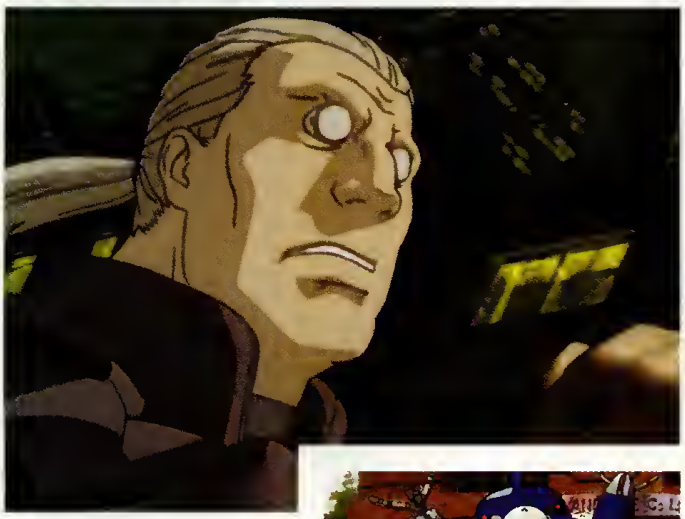
→ The content in *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* is certainly not for the squeamish. With exploding heads (robot heads, but heads nevertheless) and heavy neo-future political themes flying back and forth, it takes a steady mind to keep pace with the cyber terrorism plotline.













→ The spider-like Tachikomas make plenty of appearances in *Stand Alone Complex*, particularly in the lighthearted intermissions in which the 'komas have whimsical conversations amongst themselves. Curiouser and curiouser.



commander, Aramaki, an aging spook with connections worldwide; the rookie, Togusa, with hardly any metal in his head; and the heavy, Batou, part metal soldier and part human flatfoot. And, of course, there is Major Motoko Kusanagi, a total cyborg underneath a very stylish exterior, who carries the more specific mandate to wreck everything and look good doing it.

Unlike the better-known movie, the *Stand Alone Complex* TV series spends a lot of time with the supporting cast. "In the movie, Kusanagi was the main character," notes Kamiyama, "but in the TV series, we have a lot of episodes to work with. So we wanted an atmosphere where each character was important."

Ghost in the Shell actually has two titles. In Japanese characters, it's *Koukaku Kidoutai*, meaning something like "aggressive armored TAC squad." The two names reflect the two sides of the show—thoughtful science fiction mixed with a hard-boiled police story. *Stand Alone Complex* isn't afraid to feature literate plots and dialogue, staying true to Masamune Shirow's vision of near-future politics and technology, but it also isn't afraid to shut up and smash things.

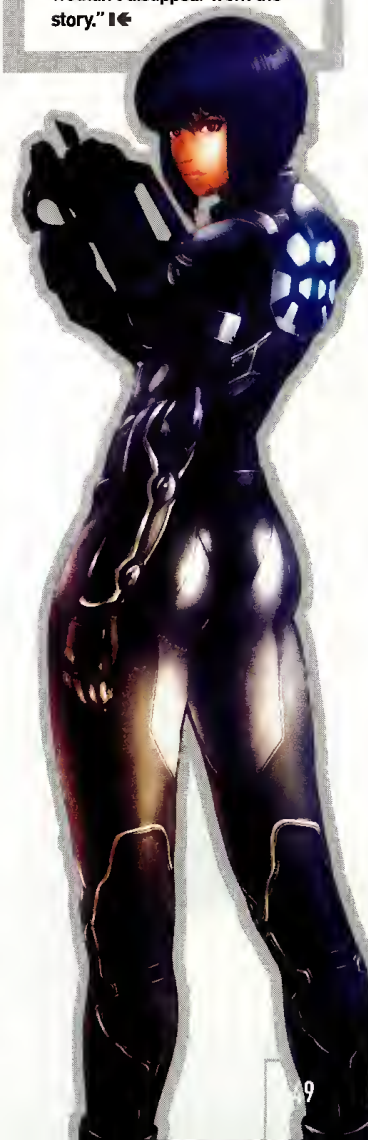
Which it does in high style, featuring top-notch animation and a beautiful soundtrack by *Cowboy Bebop* composer Yoko Kanno, blending pop, electronica, and hard indie rock. *Stand Alone Complex* was so expensive—nearly 300 staff members contributed to the production—that it wound up broadcast on pay-per-view. The DVD release followed shortly after, but fans paid up anyway for what was obviously the best thing going.

Americans have to wait for it, of course, but some things—like the major, for instance—are worth the wait.

MOTOKO'S BACK



The major undergoes a major transformation at the end of the original *Ghost in the Shell* comic, and the movie, *Innocence*, is based on a similar story line. In *Stand Alone Complex*, though, she's the same as she ever was. "Mr. Shirow didn't want the main character, Motoko, to disappear," explains director Kamiyama. "That's why I included Motoko, so she wouldn't disappear from the story."





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RELEASE | FALL

THE RED STAR

THE GUNS THEY GO BANG BANG!

SYSTEM PS2/XB PUBLISHER ACCLAIM DEVELOPER ACCLAIM STUDIOS AUSTIN

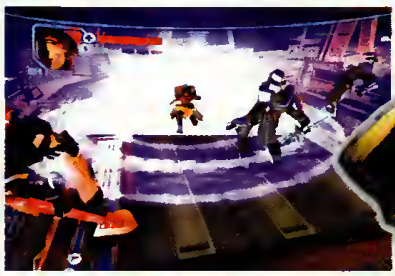








→ Acclaim takes old-school gameplay and welds it to a popular modern-day comic series. The result? Good times, man. Good times.





Alternative histories are always pretty kooky, whether they propose that Napoleon won Waterloo or that the Confederates obtained submachine guns right before Gettysburg. *The Red Star* proposes an equally odd yet game- and comic-friendly alternative history: Russia has managed to fuse magic and fancy technology to create a kick-ass military. Acclaim is working closely with *Red Star* comic creator, writer, and artist Christian Gossett, who lent both his art and scripting skills to the game. The comic stars playable characters Sorceress-General Maya Antares, along with her bodyguard, Kyuzo, and the Norgorkan rebel Makita.

The game is a deceptively straightforward side-scrolling beat/shoot-em-up—think *Final Fight* plus *Contra*. Whomever you end up choosing, you blast/punch/swing your way through legions of enemies before fighting a big boss man. Kyuzo is a big brawler who uses hefty spears and guns that shoot straight and hard to hit anything around him. Makita is quite spry, and her quick melee attacks are more focused on slicing individual targets while her guns sweep the area. Maya is being kept under wraps, but since she is a sorceress-general, expect her attacks to center around "protokols" (*Red Star*-speak for magic), which add an extra layer of strategy to the mix.

For every melee or ranged hit you land, you build up your Protokol meter. Not only do protokols look cool and damage everything on the screen, but they can also be combined. If you get a buddy to play co-op with you, you can time your protokols to complement each other's attacks—whether by simply performing two attacks at once or by having one protokol enhance the other (such as by amplifying damage or adding elemental effects). Combolicious!

GMR SAYS → It's actually pretty cool to see such an old-school and, dare we say, Eastern game coming from a Western developer. We like this imminent Red invasion.

→ HOW HOT...

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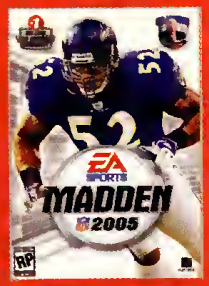
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RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

SPY FICTION

THE MASTER OF DISGUISE

☐SYSTEM PS2 ☐PUBLISHER SAMMY STUDIOS ☐DEVELOPER ACCESS GAMES













→ The tuxedo is the least of the disguises *Spy Fiction*'s heroes can use. Their sneaking suits integrate *Predator*-style optical camouflage, and the 3D camera gadget can copy almost any guise (although Billy, the male lead, can't imitate women).

PS2

Spy Fiction made an unfortunate first impression in 2003. The debut version of the game bore a close resemblance to _Metal Gear Solid_—not a bad game to _imitate_, but the first screens were almost lawsuit material.

A year later, the game that's coming to America this fall is practically unrecognizable in comparison. It looks like a smooth blend of espionage concepts, inspired by director Hideteka "Suery" Suehiro's obsession with spy movies and stories, while it feels more like *Everything or Nothing* than *Metal Gear Solid*.

Spy Fiction isn't primarily a stealth game, although that's part of the mix. Both characters have options besides optical camouflage and holographic disguise systems. The gadgeteers' arsenals include 16 useful toys, plus more than a dozen weapons, if you favor the direct approach.

The main espionage missions tend to offer a few routes for getting past key obstacles. Climbing tools can carry a spy over patrolling guards. Holographic disguises let them imitate guards, although they won't hold up against the closest of scrutiny. Other gadgets suggest other solutions—tranquilizer guns, flash grenades, timed "bandage bombs," and more. In between the sneaky stuff, there are simpler set-piece levels, like a rappelling challenge patterned after Tom Cruise's computer hack in *Mission: Impossible*.

In the American release, there's one more gadget—a sticky remote camera for shooting from a distance—but that's the least of several additions. The U.S. version also includes new lighting effects, new objectives, controls for shaking down captured guards, and smarter enemy A.I. The bad guys have a longer range of detection and better awareness of areas above them, so it's harder to sneak along ceilings. Not an improvement for the heroes, maybe, but certainly a welcome addition for the paying customer.

GMA SAYS → Not as flashy as James Bond's latest, but solid espionage action awaits.

→ HOW HOT...

GMR PRESENTS THE ULTIMATE

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MATURE 17+ M ESRB — Blood and Gore, Intense Violence

PlayStation.2

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RELEASE | FALL

ROME: TOTAL WAR

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☐SYSTEM PC ☐PUBLISHER ACTIVISION ☐DEVELOPER THE CREATIVE ASSEMBLY













→ The thought of thousands of red- and blue-clad Roman gladiators buzzing around the screen like so many fireflies, topping heads off with swords, is enough to make an editor's blood boil, which would be bad since that editor would soon be dead. *Caliente*!

Make sure you've got on a clean pair of togas when you roll into Rome, kid. The massive battles that are the hallmark of the *Total War* series are back, better—and easier. Don't think this means it'll be a cakewalk, though. It's not. Control as little or as much of the action as you like; direct armies, govern cities, and do your damnedest to expand the empire. Get advice every step of the way, and when you see where you're hurting, have A.I. assistants pick up the slack.

Where you'll first want to see this game in action is in the seriously epic battles. Now, when it comes to real-time strategy games these days, publishers like to drop the E-bomb. But it's not until you see 10,000 individual units—and we're talking everything from soldiers and war elephants to cavalry and catapults here—beating the living crap out of each other that you have a real appreciation for the word.

Anyhow, through the course of the game, you'll be able to unlock 20 different civilizations and lead them into battle. A big and very noticeable jump from the first two games is the use of a tight 3D engine. Everything is individually rendered so that you can pull back to plan your attack or zoom in and see some pikemen stick it to 'em.

The other huge improvement is an actual use for that strategic between-fight map. It's now fully rendered in 3D to give you a good overview of the land. See an army massing in a valley? You can set up armies on either side and swoop in, taking note that those valleys are represented in the skirmish. No random map-generated surprises in the campaign here. That's not even going into the diplomacy and management aspects. All of this can be doled out to the A.I., of course. Still, you're gonna need to use your brain at some point if you plan to claim Rome for your own.

GMR SAYS → *Total War* may be turning back the clock, but it's thinking ahead—and fixing what was broke in the process.

→ HOW HOT...

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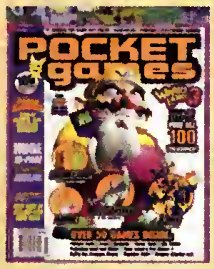
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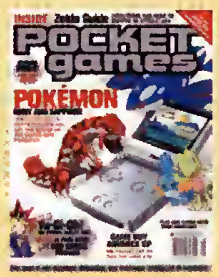
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RELEASE | WINTER

PAPER MARIO 2

THE SECOND CUT IS THE DEEPEST

SYSTEM GC PUBLISHER NINTENDO DEVELOPER INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS













→ The amount of onscreen chaos that occurs at once is breathtaking (above). It'd be nice if more companies took a chance on 2D as an art form instead of churning out indiscernible 3D hogwash all the time. Is that nostalgia speaking, or will the renaissance take place? Who knows?



Nintendo RPGs tend to be few and far between, but it turns out we'll be blessed with two of them in just two years. After starring in last year's excellent *Superstar Saga* on GBA, Mario returns for a sequel to *Paper Mario* on GameCube, and with Intelligent Systems once again delivering the goods, you know it's something to look forward to.

For those who didn't play the N64 original, the name refers to the graphical style. As in *PaRappa the Rapper*, characters are rendered as flat, papertike sheets against a full 3D world. On N64, this was more or less just an amusing quirk, but in the sequel, it'll give Mario some odd abilities, including the power to fold himself up into a paper airplane and fly or roll himself up into a tube to fit through tight tunnels.

Clearly, the overall vibe is less serious than your average RPG, and other touches reflect this as well. Battles take place on a theater stage, with an audience visible on the bottom. If you nail the timing-based attacks central to the battle system, the audience will get excited and cheer for you, earning you stars that can be used in special attacks. Do poorly, though, and they'll throw damage-causing cans and rocks in protest. The size of the audience is at least partially persistent between encounters, so if you consistently please the crowd, you'll have a bigger and bigger advantage as you progress.

The growing crowd is a good example of the sort of graphics you can expect, too. Since the character models are so simple, every one is sharp and well defined, and hundreds can fit onscreen at once—one scene in which a Dry Bones enemy summons his kin results in Dry Bones literally filling the screen.

Luckily, Nintendo's being nice and looking to get *Paper Mario 2* out around the end of the year. Plenty of time to bone up on your origami.

GMR SAYS → The first game was awesome, the sequel looks even awesomer

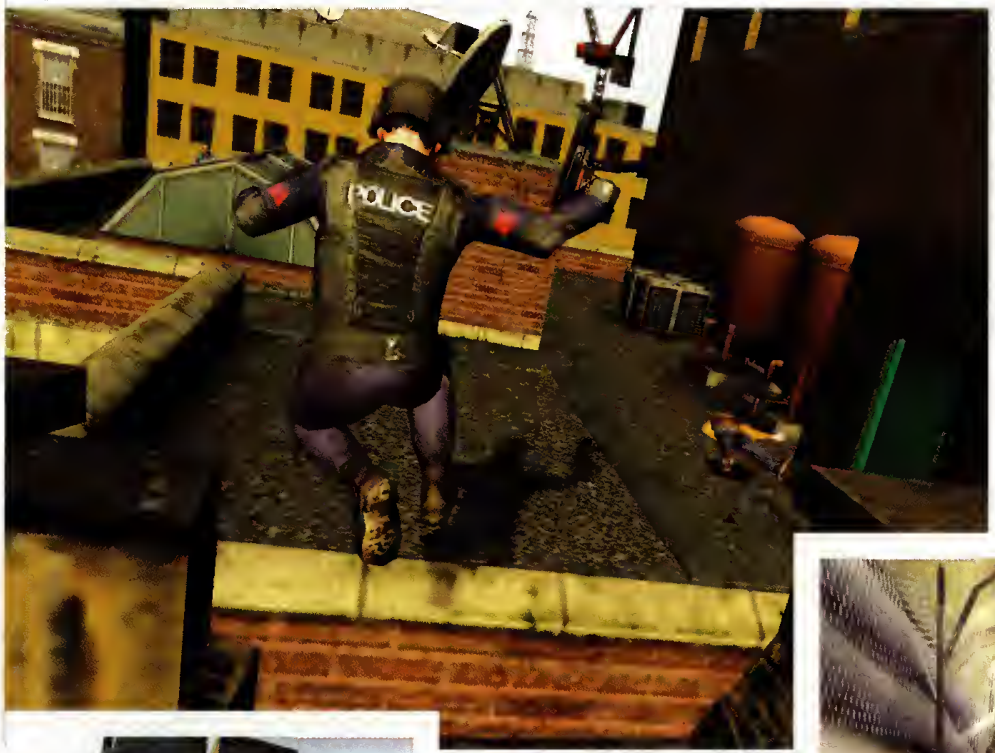
→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | FALL

THE GETAWAY 2

ONCE AGAIN, IN BLOODY ENGLAND...

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER SCEA DEVELOPER TEAM SOHO





→ If you've ever wanted to play something like *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* in videogame form, this is your chance.









→ *The Getaway 2* promises to be quite a bit different from Sony's original PS2 crime drama. It's still very realistic and very hard-boiled, and it's crafted with the same attention to cinematic detail, but beneath that harsh exterior, Team Soho plans to build a more complex, open-ended experience.

Any steps in that direction would be a massive improvement on the original, which marched in scripted lockstep from beginning to inevitable end. Its successor, according to Sony, offers different paths through both its story and gameplay. Players are free to choose different escape routes and shoot-out strategies through 22 missions of driving and gunplay, while the plot branches at key points and skips backward and forward in time.

Getaway 2 begins two years after the conclusion of the first game, with crime lord Charlie Jolson rotting at the bottom of the Thames. Three main characters—Mitch, Sam, and Eddie, occupying both sides of the line between cops and criminals—find themselves trapped in an underworld feud with several potential outcomes. Key decisions made along the different character arcs determine how the game will end.

The sequel's cinematics feature all the original's flash and then some—the game includes more than 20 fully motion-captured actors and accurate lip-syncing animation, plus new rag-doll physics for detailed death animations to provide gameplay with a more smoothly cinematic feel. Team Soho's famous virtual rendition of the London streets is back as well, with more areas added to replicate 17 new districts and landmarks. New indoor environments show off more detailed surface modeling and more interactive background elements.

The Getaway was the best movie ever written and directed for a videogame console. But this time, Team Soho is giving the player a little more time in the director's chair.

GMA SAYS → Give us a go 'ere, mate! We just wanna take it fo' a spin! Know what oy mean?

→ HOW HOT...

PS2

RELEASE | WINTER '04

RISE OF THE KASAI

TRIBAL ADVENTURE IN 360 DEGREES

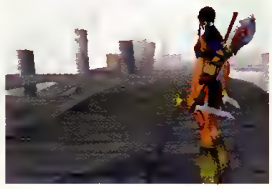
☐SYSTEM PS2 ☐PUBLISHER SCEA ☐DEVELOPER BOTTLE ROCKET ENTERTAINMENT













→ Will people take to *Kasai*'s Pocahontas-lookin' raven-haired beauty, Tati? We're hoping the answer is yes, but it didn't quite work for *BG&E*, now did it? Still, this should please fans of *The Mark of Kri*.

PS2

The original *Mark of Kri* was a unique hybrid of Disney-style animation and pure ultraviolence. The character designs look like something out of *Lilo & Stitch*, yet the fluid sword strikes and decapitations added a darker edge to the game. After taking out the Dark One, *Mark of Kri* ended with the optimistic words, "Look for the further adventures of Rau." Well, *Rise of the Kasai* is coming to collect on that promise.

In an interesting storytelling twist, *Kasai* actually takes place both 10 years before *Kri* and also 10 years after it. In fact, the very beginning of *Kasai* features the death of Rau, that husky fellow from *Kri*. The 10 levels jump around to key points in Rau's life, leading up to his end. Not only can you play as Rau again, but you can also play as his sister Tati, among other playable characters that SCEA hasn't revealed yet. Rau still sports his sword, ax, bow, and spear, while Tati's weapons include a set of daggers, an ax, and a staff with retractable blades. But unlike her big brother, she can also become completely invisible. While Rau can still use his spirit bird Kuzo to scout out the terrain, Tati can use a technique called spirit walk to see through the eyes of the dead for her reconnaissance. Also, two players can hop on and kill baddies cooperatively (or, if you really have no friends, the A.I. can control the other character).

Another distinguishing point for *Kri* was its unique combat system, which had you swinging the right analog stick around to target some fools and then using the face buttons to deliver the hurt on individual victims. *Kasai* builds on this by letting you target up to nine baddies and then use each button to attack groups of them at a time. There's still a lot of time before you can actually start slicing fools yourself, but *Kasai* sounds promising so far.

GMR SAYS → It's early, but we see potential in another game in which Disney meets bloodshed

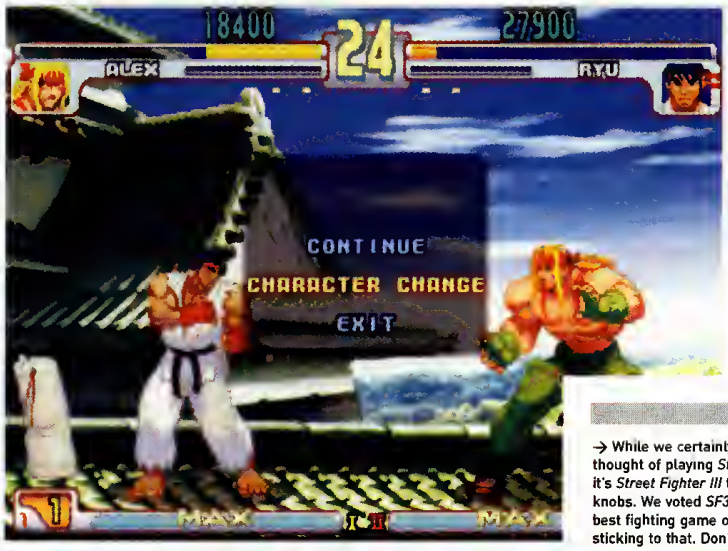
→ HOW HOT...

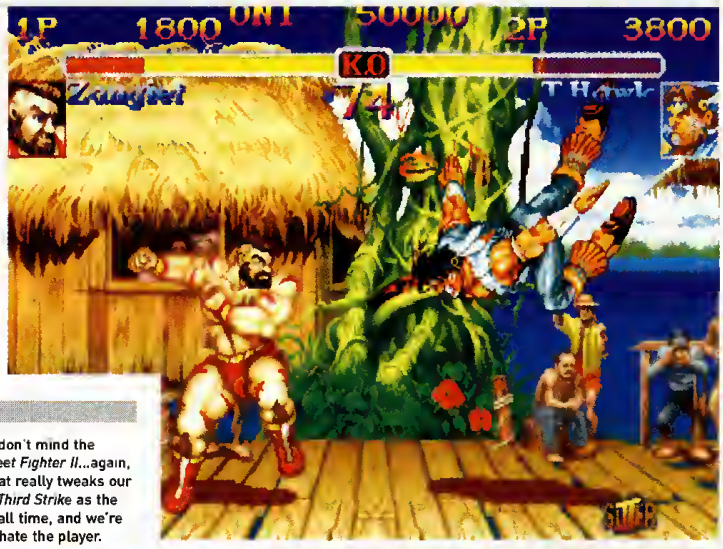
RELEASE | SUMMER

STREET FIGHTER ANNIVERSARY COLLECTION

SIX RYUS. SIX KENS. SIX CHUN-LIS. ONE GAME

☐SYSTEM PS2 ☐PUBLISHER CAPCOM ☐DEVELOPER CAPCOM

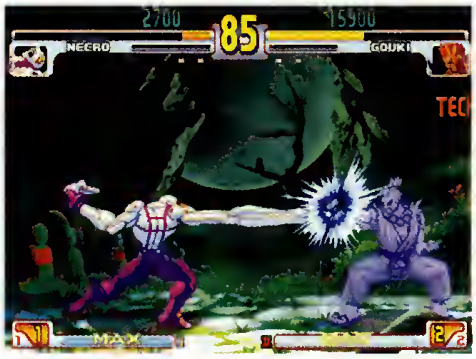




→ While we certainly don't mind the thought of playing *Street Fighter II*...again, it's *Street Fighter III* that really tweaks our knobs. We voted *SF3: Third Strike* as the best fighting game of all time, and we're sticking to that. Don't hate the player.







If Capcom has given up on producing original *Street Fighter*s for the time being, at least it has a massive back catalog to mine. *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* is a unique retrospective on the series, chronicling the earliest beginnings and the very end of the series that came to define its own genre.

The end of the *Anniversary Collection* is simple enough. It's a straight port of 1999's *Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike*, arguably the ultimate evolution of the series as a 1-on-1 fighter (although that depends on your opinion of its predecessor, *Street Fighter Alpha 3*). Capcom has promised no significant additions to the game, which unfortunately means no online competition, but there's a training mode for new players to use to master the defense and grading systems, and it would be a surprise to see anything but a pixel-perfect conversion.

The beginning, on the other hand, is a little more complicated. This half of the collection is the game released in Japan as *Hyper Street Fighter II: Anniversary Edition*, a compilation of the characters from the first five *Street Fighter II*s. It's not a compilation of the games themselves, exactly—all the characters are thrown into the same mix, a massive dream match pitting each version of each fighter against all the others. Try out *Champion Edition* Ryu versus *Hyper Fighting* Ken, the original Chun-Li versus her *Super Street Fighter II Turbo* counterpart, and any other absurdly unbalanced matchup you'd like to try.

Anniversary Edition throws in some other extras for hardcore fans—there's a gallery mode with concept art from throughout the series—but the "who'd win?" factor is the biggest hook. The hardest of the hardcore will no doubt have fun showing off with a bone-stock *Street Fighter II* star whaling on the juiced-up *Super Turbo* competition. Sadly, there's no crossing over with the *3rd Strike* fighters.

GMR SAYS → Let's face it, *Guilty Gear* is nice, but it's no *Street Fighter*, now is it?

→ HOW HOT...

PS2

RELEASE | JUNE

CRIMSON TEARS

DRY YOUR EYES. THIS GAME ROCKS

SYSTEM PS2 PUBLISHER CAPCOM DEVELOPER DREAM FACTORY



PS2

It was 1995 when a small band of coders, programmers, artists, and animators surprised the industry by breaking free from the confines of their respective (and admittedly high-profile) places of employment on Sega's *Virtua Fighter* and Namco's *Tekken* teams. When it was announced that the first project under their new Dream Factory banner would be a fighting game designed in partnership with *Dragon Ball's* Akira Toriyama and published by none other than Square, you could feel the ground shake.

That game would be *Tobal No. 1*, which, due to the playable *Final Fantasy VII* demo that came packaged with it, was quickly overshadowed by its more glamorous associate. That's a shame, since *Tobal* featured some of the most precise, balanced fighting mechanics yet seen in a 3D fighting game. *Tobal's* stellar sequel, *Tobal 2*, expanded upon the first game's' blocky, flat-shaded graphics with lush visuals, improved controls, and most importantly, the groundbreaking quest mode, which took *Tobal's* characters and sent them spiriting away in a 3D dungeon battle that, to this day, stands the test of time as one of gaming's preeminent RPG-styled brawlers. The company then went on to create the *Final Fantasy* fighter more officially known as *Ehrgeiz* for the arcade and PlayStation, the PS version of which continued the quest mode theme. Unfortunately, neither the fighting portion nor the quest element held up to the standard set by *Tobal 2* (which was never released in the States), and each of Dream Factory's subsequent releases suffered from an inexplicable decline in quality. From the high-profile dud *The Bouncer* through the lean *UFC* years and all the way to rock bottom with the paint-by-numbers Xbox fighter *Kakuto Chojin*, it seemed as if Dream Factory was done for.

But everyone loves a comeback, and based on our extensive playtime with the Dream Factory-developed, Capcom-published *Crimson Tears*, it seems safe to say this may be the development team's second coming. Upon firing up

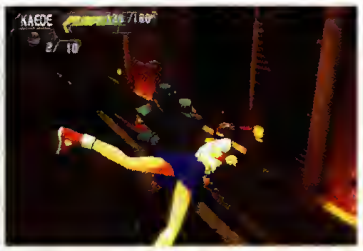














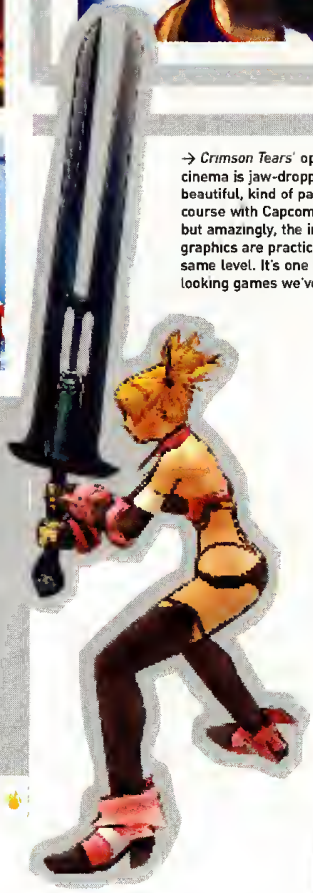
TOBAL OR NOT TOBAL 2, TOO

As we mentioned in *GMR* #14 in our "The Ones That Got Away" featurette, *Tobal 2* is the best game that never came to the United States. Its nonappearance can be blamed on *Tobal No. 1*'s relative failure at the box office. With PlayStation still in its infant years and *Dragon Ball* not yet the behemoth in North America that it is now, not even Akira Toriyama's character designs could save *Tobal 2* from the "import only" category. A little-known fact is that Square once considered bringing *Tobal 2* to the States around the time of *Final Fantasy Chronicles*' release to flesh out its lean roster for that year. But for whatever reason, the company never took the plunge, relegating *Tobal 2* to "coulda been" status forevermore. Sob!



PS2

→ *Crimson Tears*' opening cinema is jaw-droppingly beautiful, kind of par for the course with Capcom these days, but amazingly, the in-game graphics are practically on the same level. It's one of the best-looking games we've ever seen.



the game, the first thing you notice is its striking cel-shaded graphics. While the screenshots look nice, the game is even more beautiful in motion. Running at a steady 60 frames per second, *Crimson Tears* looks like what Capcom's own *Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter* would look like if it were a 3D adventure game.

The premise is simple: Three androids of significant power (Amber, Kadie, and Tokio) are unleashed to uncover the cause of a mysterious disaster that has leveled their city. This translates to the phoenixlike rebirth of *Tobal 2*'s legendary quest mode, outfitted with all the graphical perks a next-gen system like PS2 can provide. Besides running through labyrinthine dungeons and pummeling every enemy that comes your way (for precious material drops and key cards), gamers can upgrade each character's move list and armament via experience gains and customized weapon enhancements.

The controls, while more like *Double Dragon* than *Tekken 4*, are still diverse and flashy enough to dispel boredom. The enemies are none too bright, the costumes are outlandish, and the level layout is little more than a randomly generated series of grid-based dungeons, but *Crimson Tears* still offers some of the best old-school fun we've had in a long time. Plus, it looks great, so what more could you ask for?

GMR SAYS → Give us an action game any day of the week. Give us *Crimson Tears*

→ HOW HOT...

RELEASE | SEPTEMBER

DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY

LIKE A SIZE 12 K-SWISS TO THE MOUTH

SYSTEM GC/PS2/XB PUBLISHER ELECTRONIC ARTS DEVELOPER EA CANADA/AKI CORPORATION













→ We hope that *DJFFNY* developer Aki has come up with a remedy for the first game's rotten targeting system. Trying to switch between multiple targets was a gamer's nightmare.

Like a 10-year-old kid who can't spit out enough ideas he wants in his ideal game, EA seems to have included every possible feature in *Def Jam Fight for NY*. Weapons? Check. Destructible environments? Check. Varied battle types, create-a-player mode, PS2 online play? It's all here.

Perhaps the biggest change of all is that *DJFFNY* isn't even a wrestling game anymore. It has those elements, but the central fighting system now has five different styles, with street fighting, kickboxing, martial arts, and submission joining wrestling. What's more, players can customize elements of those five into their own specific styles. If you want to have a character who can kickbox, wrestle, and street fight, you can make that happen.

The story follows what happened at the end of the first game. D-Mob, the leader of your crew, escapes from jail and wants his old life back, being in charge of the underground fights. But he discovers that a new leader named Crow (played by Snoop Dogg) now rules the fight club circuit, so it's your job to take out Crow and get D-Mob back on top. There will be tons of celebrities along the way as well, with faces such as Flava Flav, Busta Rhymes, and Slick Rick popping up in different places. It appears the cinemas will turn out to be a bit less cheesy than in the original, too.

So *DJFFNY* has every feature the streamlined original was missing and a few more that give it the potential to be a genre-defining package. Plus, it looks amazing—just check out these pictures. Sure, they're superpolished, and the game won't look quite this good on a console, but it's still one of the most beautiful games around. The only thing that has us worried is the risk of making a game with so many different features—especially in terms of the different combat styles. Will they all mix well? Early signs point to yes.

GMA SAYS → Prettier, feature-loaded, and everything the first game should have been.

→ HOW HOT...

XB

PS2

GC

RELEASE | **JUNE**

SPIDER-MAN 2

ALL COVERED IN STICKY WEBFLUID

☐SYSTEM GC/PS2/XB ☐PUBLISHER ACTIVISION ☐DEVELOPER TREYARCH

Although the company demonstrated the game at last year's E3, Activision has finally given us a chance to play *Spider-Man 2*. Of course, the big change is the nonlinear gameplay; it feels a lot like *Crimson Skies*, actually—you're almost flying, after all, and optional miniquests pop up as icons as you zoom on by. Only when you're ready does the story continue. Speaking of story, Tobey Maguire lends his pipes to the role of Spider-Man once again, with similarly sardonic results.

Strikingly, there's no longer any swinging endlessly over the void with your webs grabbing the blue skies—Spidey's got to latch onto buildings for real; if not, he can plummet all the way to the street. The best thing is, it works just right. You'll be tooling around town in moments, with high jumps and smooth controls keeping those skyscrapers in check.

With the full vertical height of Manhattan on display, it's a joy to leap and swing from surface to surface, navigating between buildings and hopping over obstacles just as Spidey does in the movies—and didn't do in the last game. If you can see somewhere, you can go there, New Jersey excepted. (Perhaps that's for the best.)

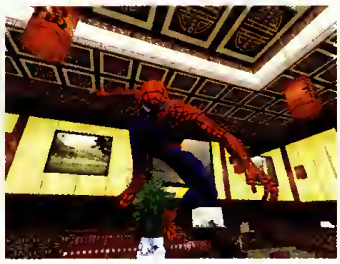
Combat is also getting an overhaul, featuring enhanced combos and an air-juggling system that allows the webslinger to launch his enemies upward and smack 'em back down again. We leave you with a handy Spidequation: *GTA*-style nonlinearity plus the story of the second movie equals another license to print money.

GMA SAYS → Will this movie tie-in rise to the top? Cream of the crop? Oh, do stop.

→ HOW HOT...







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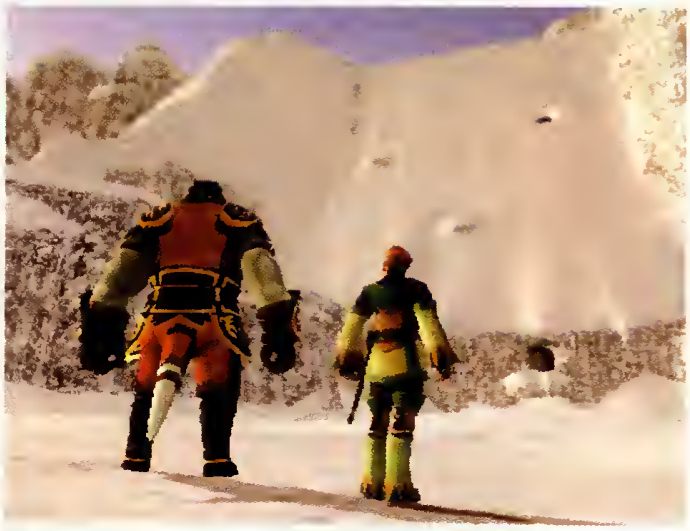
GALLERY

FINAL FANTASY XI: CHAINS

NOT QUITE HAWAII. BUT WE STILL WANT TO GO THERE

Final Fantasy XI fans have a lot to look forward to with the recently announced expansion, titled _Chains of Promathia_. Included in this expander is a distinct new island location (different from the isle of Kazham) called the Tavnazian Archipelago, which lies off the west coast of Quon. Formerly connected to the mainland, a massive explosion caused by the beastmen obliterated a great expanse of the surrounding real estate. It is thought that none of the island's former inhabitants survived. It's up to you and your party to discover the truth.









→ Players who've indulged in the goldsmithing and alchemic arts will gravitate to the new area known as Movalpolos, which is inhabited by a tribe of goblins known as the moblins. This industrial city (shown above) shares elements with Bastok, but it's suggested that the moblin specialties extend to more ambitious sciences, such as bionics.



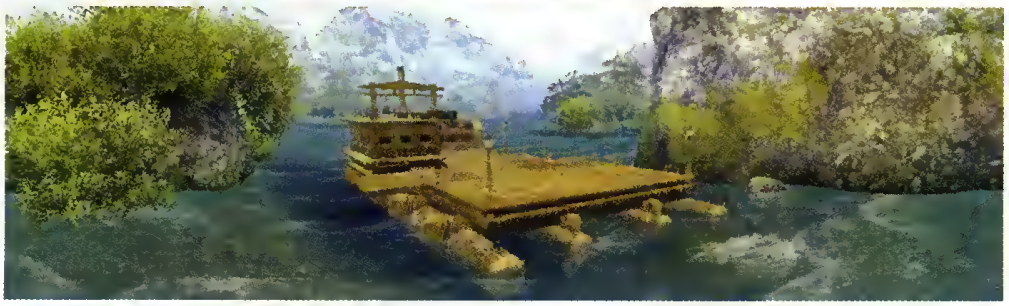
PC
PS2

» NEXT GALLERY

OF PROMATHIA

→ We're not sure if *Chains of Promathia* adds any new job classes or if it even raises the current level cap (75), but evidence currently suggests that it does not. The focus of the game is on adding new environments, quests, missions, and items. But considering how much stuff Square already implements in mere patch updates, we expect *Promathia* to be packed to the gills with stuff.











KINGDO

GMR EXPLORES THE FUTURE OF KINGDOM HEARTS. THE

Prior to 2002, you couldn't mention the words "Disney" and "videogame" in the same sentence without conjuring images of low-budget platformers timed to coincide with the release of the latest Disney "blockbuster." These games were functional and uninspired at best, and at worst, affronts to the game-buying public. Square (now Square Enix) changed all that.

From the outset, the prospects for Square's fledgling *Kingdom Hearts* project looked shaky. Longtime *Final Fantasy* character designer Tetsuya Nomura had been around the development block a few times but was untested as a game designer. And despite the *Final Fantasy* association, convincing gamers to sign off on a Disney-related game—especially one as comprehensively Disney-esque as *Kingdom Hearts*—would never be easy. Imagine then, everyone's surprise when *Kingdom Hearts*, both in its country of origin (Japan) and North America, experienced long-term success, even when compared against Square's own bread-and-butter franchise. In Japan, where the biggest hits move millions of copies in their first couple weeks of release and then settle into the background, *Kingdom Hearts* started off slowly, but six





_By James Mielke

M COME

SERIES THAT PUT THE MAGIC BACK IN THE MAGIC KINGDOM

months later was still selling hundreds of thousands of copies a week. In North America, well, 2 million copies sold and counting means that Sora, Donald, and Goofy are sipping from the same fine crystal as games like *Madden*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Gran Turismo*.

So now comes the follow-up. Although the eventuality of a sequel was never much in question, it was never quite guaranteed either. When *Kingdom Hearts II* for PlayStation 2 was finally unveiled at a Square Enix press conference during the 2003 Tokyo Game Show, the gaming media was delighted, but hardly surprised. But when *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*—the unexpected link between the first and second PS2 episodes—was announced, for Game Boy Advance no less, people sat up and took notice. From the brief footage Square showed, you could tell that this GBA title would contain the same high production values as the PS2 games. And from the brief trailer of *Kingdom Hearts II*, it was obvious that this sequel would make your heart soar just as the first one had only a year ago. It's with pleasure that we offer you a closer look at the next two installments in Square Enix's "other" flagship series. Enter the kingdom....















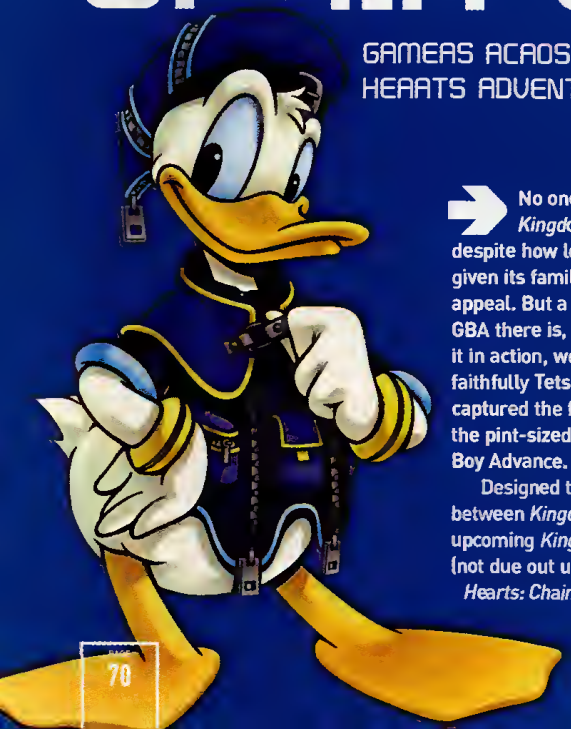




GBA

CHAIN OF MEMORIES

GAMEAS ACAOSS THE WOALD. CAN YOU SAY "BECAUSE WE LOVE YOU"? IT'S A KINGDOM HEAATS ADVENTUAE YOU CAN HOLD IN YOUR HAND. GMA PAOVIDES A CLOSE-UP LOOK



No one ever expected a *Kingdom Hearts* game for GBA, despite how logical it might seem given its family-friendly consumer appeal. But a *Kingdom Hearts* game for GBA there is, and now that we've seen it in action, we're impressed by how faithfully Tetsuya Nomura's team has captured the feel of the PS2 game in the pint-sized 2D format of the Game Boy Advance.

Designed to chronicle the events between *Kingdom Hearts* and the upcoming *Kingdom Hearts II* for PS2 (not due out until 2005), *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* continues the adventures of Sora and his Disneyland allies. One day, as Sora comes to a crossroads (both figuratively and literally), he finds himself longing for the company of his companions. At this point, a shadowy figure approaches him and says, "Ahead lies what you seek...but to claim it you must lose something dear." As veterans of the first game know, *Kingdom Hearts* is full of epic, heart-tugging stuff, and as the familiar notes of the *KH* theme song "Simple and Clean" chime along, players know that the time for yet another grand adventure has come.

The game is an action-RPG at its core. Although it contains a variety of platforming mechanics (Sora can grab ledges, climb vines, do evasive rolls, double-jump, etc.), the stat-building elements and card-collecting aspects of the game paint it closer to the realm of role-playing games than a *Mario*-esque platformer.

Don't let the mention of the card-collecting fool you—this isn't *Yu-Gi-Oh!*. In *Chain of Memories*, Sora gathers three types of cards with which to make three types of decks. The Attack deck is triggered when Sora uses his Keyblade in melee combat. The Support Magic deck activates healing magic, while the Attack Magic deck allows him to use spells like Fire and













GBA

Blizzard and also contains powerful summon characters, like Cloud, Goofy, and Bambi. As you kill enemies and level up, you gain additional cards. Each card has a different numerical value indicating the strength of the attack or magic, and each deck has a numerical value indicating the number of remaining cards. Once a deck is depleted, Sora must charge it up by holding down the appropriate button, which reshuffles and refreshes the deck. The penalty here is that it takes a few seconds, leaving Sora vulnerable to attack. A sense of timing is required.

As Sora progresses through the game, he earns experience and levels up. Each time he levels up you can assign points to improve his attributes, like health points, attack power, or card count in each deck.

The goal in each level is to progress through each stage until you ultimately encounter the level-ending boss. To get to the boss, however, you must battle scores of roaming Heartless and retrieve cards from their shattered bodies. Specific cards must be acquired in order to pass through specific doors (e.g. a Heart door requires a Heart card). Should the rigors of battle prove too strenuous for Sora, he can press against either side of the screen until an Escape meter appears. As you press against the border of the screen, the meter fills. If you successfully fill the meter, you'll exit the battle unscathed. If you're hit, you must battle, or try again. It's a surprisingly well-rounded battle system that looks fantastic in action and features a high-quality soundtrack and excellent vocal samples (Sora has an amazing number of battle-specific yelps).

Scheduled for release this fall, *Chain of Memories* will not only fill the gaps in the story line (although Nomura says playing *COM* is not integral to following the events of *KH2*), but also help whittle away the time until *Kingdom Heart II*'s release sometime in mid-2005. Until then, pint-sized Sora will have to do.

KINGDOM HEARTS II

THE EPIC ADVENTURES OF SORA, DONALD, AND GOOFY CONTINUE ON PLAYSTATION 2 IN 2005. GMR GIVES YOU AN EARLY LOOK AT THIS MICKEY MOUSE OPERATION. RIGHT HERE, RIGHT NOW











→ Will *Kingdom Hearts II* go the *Dynasty Warriors* route, as evidenced by these scenes (at left) of Sora, Donald, and Goofy preparing to do battle with thousands of the Heartless? Hardly, but it should give an indication of the sense of scale that director Tetsuya Nomura and company are going for in this highly anticipated sequel. After all, it has to be hard to top all the content offered by the first *Kingdom Hearts*, but that won't stop them from trying.

The premise is simple: Sora is looking for his friends Kairi and Riku, while Donald and Goofy are looking for their missing king, Mickey Mouse. A year (in the *KH* universe) has passed since the conclusion of *Kingdom Hearts*, and *Kingdom Hearts II* marks the start of an adventure that's bigger, brighter, and seemingly better than the one in the first game. The Heartless are back, and Sora must enlist the help of an even greater star-studded cast than he did in the first game.

A brand-new villain (or is he?) emerges, hidden by a mask, and he seems to be the force behind the resurgence of the Heartless. Unveiling just who this masked instigator is will be only a portion of Sora's concerns. Other new enemies, like the voracious Axel (who debuts in *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories*), are integral to the game's events, and Sora will cross Axel's path many times before the day is done. Naturally, other characters, like Auron (of *Final Fantasy X*) and—surprise!—Vincent from *Final Fantasy VII* make pit stops in *KH2*. In addition, many other guests from both the Disney and Square universes appear in the game.

Once again directed by former *Final Fantasy* character designer Tetsuya Nomura (who clearly has a lot on his plate with his other project, *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children*), *Kingdom Hearts II* displays—based on the trailer we saw—an even greater flair for the cinematic than the first game. Whether it's Sora and his gang staring down insurmountable odds or a certain mysterious mouse showing up in a nick of time, the game is sure to be filled with signature moments.

Joining Nomura is Yuichi Kanemori, who is responsible for the game's battle system. Square's holding the precise details close to the vest, but the things we've seen indicate that the battles will be more exciting and offer more flexibility, options, and control to the player. Kazushige Nojima (whose work can be found in *Final Fantasy VII* and *VIII*) is *Kingdom Hearts II*'s scenario director and will be responsible for many of the lumps you find lodged firmly in your throat when the game ships sometime in mid-2005. Expect more concrete details as they emerge, but for the time being, settle back and enjoy the screens, *Kingdom* style.

PS2





→ *Final Fantasy X* fans will be glad to know everyone's favorite one-eyed mentor, Auron (above), makes a cameo in *Kingdom Hearts II*.





→ Eagle-eyed readers (you know who you are) will notice a certain familiar cloaked figure in the screenshot to the left. Yes, Mickey Mouse is featured more prominently in *Kingdom Hearts II*, as an enigmatic Jedi-like ally to our heroic trio. They'll need all the help they can get with new threats like the flame-haired nemesis Axel (below) running amok.





PS2

GC

A RETURN TO THE KINGDOM

A LOOK BACK AT THE ORIGINAL KINGDOM HEARTS



Although technically an "older" PS2 title, *Kingdom Hearts* still impresses with its extraordinarily high production values and high-priced voice talent, even when compared to the visual fireworks of the *Final Fantasy* series.

Kingdom Hearts lavishly re-creates just about every classic Disney scenario you could imagine, from Alice's Wonderland to the inside of Monstro's enormous belly—and even Tim Burton's Halloween Town (although, sadly, not the set from *Snow Dogs*). Every character animates as smoothly in 3D as they ever did on the big screen in two dimensions, and the overall effect is breathtaking. The implementation of *Final Fantasy*–style spells (Blizzaga, Thundaga, that sort of thing) into a real-time battle system is more accomplished than it sounds, and the addition of popular Square characters (like Cloud Strife, Aerith, and Cid) adds Square-style fan service on top of the already OTT Disney fan service. Awesome stuff.

However, its extremely steep difficulty and a vertigo-inducing camera mar what is otherwise a groundbreaking effort whose execution falls a little bit short of its ambitions. Here's hoping *KH2* fixes these issues.



KING OF HEARTS

PS2
GBA

GMA SITS DOWN WITH KINGDOM HEARTS DIRECTOR TETSUYA NOMURA

Tetsuya Nomura is a busy man. Not only is the former *Final Fantasy/Parasite Eve/Brave Fencer Musashi/The Bouncer* character designer directing *Kingdom Hearts: Chain of Memories* and *Kingdom Hearts II*, he's also putting the moves on *Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children* and, rumor has it, yet another game. We pry him out of his can to discuss his very full plate. Read on and learn.

GMR: Why did you guys decide to make a *Kingdom Hearts* game for GBA? Why not tell this entire story within the context of *Kingdom Hearts II*?

TETSUYA NOMURA: The story for *Kingdom Hearts II* already existed when we worked on the original *Kingdom Hearts*. At the time, the story for *Chain of Memories* wasn't as concrete. *Kingdom Hearts II* continues where we left off in the original, but a year later. Initially, we weren't planning on telling the story of that one "blank" year, but the more we started discussing the GBA version, the more we thought it'd be best to do so in *Chain of Memories*.

GMR: How much busier are you now that you are directing multiple games? Is it more satisfying than when you were doing mostly character designs?

TN: Extremely busy. I don't have any time to myself. Since I get to do most of the decision making on my projects, it is definitely a different level of satisfaction compared to when I mostly did character designs.

GMR: In *Kingdom Hearts* for PS2 there were some Disney characters you didn't have a chance to use. Have you added any to *Chain of Memories* or *KH2* that you can tell us about?

TN: We'll reveal the characters soon—please stay tuned.

GMR: What are Kairi and Riku up to in *Chain of Memories*?

TN: Well, as you might imagine, they play important roles in the game, but I cannot say what they are....

GMR: Cloud is in the game, which will please *FFVII* fans. Are there other characters worth mentioning that we should look forward to?

TN: Without saying too much, I can say that Sora's memories in the original game play a very important role in *Chain of Memories*. So there is a good chance that you will see the characters Sora came across in the original in this game.

GMR: *Kingdom Hearts* made Disney cool again and also shattered the notion that Disney games were only for kids. In hindsight, how do you feel about *Kingdom Hearts*' massive success?

TN: "Shattered the notion that Disney games were only for kids": that is exactly what I had set out to do, so I'm glad that you saw it that way. However, I believe the sequel will really tell us if *Kingdom Hearts* is a success or not.

GMR: *Chain of Memories* is primarily a one-man Sora show, despite appearances by nearly everyone from the first game. Why put the focus on Sora?

TN: *Kingdom Hearts* is Sora's story...and especially in *Chain of Memories*, Sora's memories play an important role....

GMR: Who is Axel and what is his part in *Chain of Memories*? He is also in the trailer for *KH2*. He must play a significant role.

TN: As you can see in the assets we have released, he is one of the guys who belongs to the group wearing the long black coats. His role and purpose hold the key to *KH2* and *Chain of Memories*, so I cannot discuss details at this time. However, as one of the "members" of the group, Axel's role "links" the two games, and he appears fairly early in the game.

GMR: With the first *Kingdom Hearts*, two of the



biggest complaints were the camera and the extreme difficulty level (Hello, Sephiroth). Are you adjusting *KH2* to be more user-friendly to gamers?

TN: Of course we are...no need to worry.

GMR: Are you making adjustments to the battle engine? If so, how will this affect *KH2*? Will the game have the same balance of exploration and battle as the first *Kingdom Hearts*, or will it skew toward one or the other?

TN: We are doing without the engine from the original and built a new one for *KH2*. That is because we realized the limitations of the original engine, and in order to create a better game, we had to come up with a new one.

I believe the biggest appeal of *KH* is its battle elements, so I think you will be surprised by how we've changed it. We're not just focusing on battles either—we're including quests in battle.

GMR: Are you planning to involve Utada Hikaru (who provided the theme song "Simple and Clean") in the soundtrack again? We know you're a fan.

TN: We cannot answer this question at this time.

GMR: *Kingdom Hearts* would make a fantastic movie. With your work on *FFVII: Advent Children* revealing your flair for the cinematic, it seems like a *KH* movie would be a perfect project for you. Discuss.

TN: It would be difficult to tell the story of *Kingdom Hearts* in a few hours. Even if we were to go in that direction, the most important thing would be to keep the elements that make *Kingdom Hearts* and to create a new story and put new life into it. The person who would know how to do that is myself, but unfortunately, I don't have the time right now.

GMR: Speaking of *Advent Children*, is this story your own idea, or did you collaborate with *FFVII*'s scriptwriter and director to continue the story?

TN: The planning of *Advent Children* had begun even before I took the role as director. As soon as I joined the project, I made some changes to the script and added some new elements. I am still, at this time, adding to and rewriting the script.

GMR: Is Mickey the most powerful character in the *Kingdom Hearts* universe?

TN: I have yet to reveal the most powerful character. But I'm confident that you will be surprised by Mickey's role.

GMR: Will players need to play *Chain of Memories* in order to keep track of key events in *KH2*?

TN: As I mentioned earlier, since the story for *Chain of Memories* did not exist when we already had one for *KH2*, you won't be put in a position where you have to play *Chain of Memories*. However, in order to see and know everything in the world of *Kingdom Hearts*, I recommend you play *Chain of Memories* (and patiently wait for *KH2*!).

GMR: With the first *Kingdom Hearts*, you took a wait-and-see approach before starting work on a sequel. Now that the series is a success, do you plan to turn *Kingdom Hearts* into an ongoing, *Final Fantasy*–sized franchise? What is the future of *Kingdom Hearts*?

TN: I believe that the *Final Fantasy* series is one that will continue forever. On the other hand, *Kingdom Hearts* will come to an end at some point. Whether that end comes in the next story or in several more installments, I do not know. What I do know is that I already see that "last scene" that will put an end to *Kingdom Hearts*.

A very special thanks to: Tonayense at 22nd and Harrison, Whiz Burger, Zeke's, and Wil's Mom



COP: Tech Editor Wil O'Neal and daughter Lena cook up some yummy PC gaming goodies. We suggest you keep your PC inside your house.

ZESTY PC CUISINE

Four utterly delicious rigs that go good with games

_Written by: Wil O'Neal _Photography by: Kelli Yon

Hungry for a totally state-of-the-art gaming PC? Starving for the machine that will "play it all" and make you the envy of all your friends? It's true that you can easily cop a decent gaming PC for under $1,000, but who wants a crappy beige box when there are so many other cool options out there? In a veritable feast of the senses, Technical Editor Wil O'Neal of sister magazine *Computer Gaming World* serves up four piping-hot gaming PCs, all of which earned his highest marks and are the veritable cream of the gaming crop. Expensive? Yeah, but you're worth it.

FALCON NORTHWEST FRAGBOX PRO

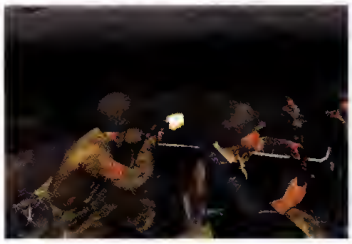
Manufacturer: Falcon Northwest
URL: www.falcon-nw.com
Price: $1,795 (computer only)

IDEAL FOR:

Falcon's FragBox Pro is designed for the LAN gamer who needs horsepower and likes the idea of toting around a 14-pound computer as opposed to a 40-pound one. Don't be fooled: When it comes to performance, the FragBox Pro can easily hang with the big boys.

GOES BEST WITH:

With a 2.8GHz Pentium 4 processor, 1GB of memory, and a 256MB GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card, the FragBox Pro was built with top-tier first-person shooters in mind. (There is also a non-Pro FragBox that's only $995.) Is your buddy throwing a massive *Call of Duty* or *Rise of Nations* LAN party? The FragBox Pro is the perfect sidekick. One downside to the FragBox Pro is upgradeability. It's not easy getting all those hot components to work well in that tiny box, which means future graphics card upgrades aren't necessarily guaranteed.







IT'S COOL BECAUSE:

Falcon worked some serious magic to get everything to work in that little box. Only by using some hardcore "cooling mods" was it able to make that GeForce FX 5950 Ultra happy.

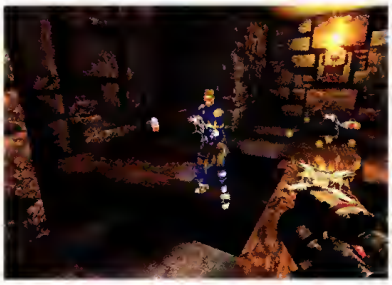
DELL INSPIRON XPS

Manufacturer: Dell
URL: www.dell.com
Price: $3,329

IDEAL FOR:

Weighing in at a hefty 10-plus pounds, Dell's Inspiron XPS isn't so much a portable as it is a "transportable." Designed for the gamer who either has limited space or doesn't want to lug a 40-pound desktop to a LAN party, as laptops go, this behemoth is about one thing: raw power.





GOES BEST WITH:

With a 3.4GHz Pentium 4 processor, 512MB of memory, and a 128MB ATI graphics card, this baby can run anything. We played everything from *Madden 2004* to the *Unreal Tournament 2004* demo on it, and we're pretty sure that it'll leave you in good shape for future releases such as *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2*.

IT'S COOL BECAUSE:

The problem with laptops is that (in the past) they haven't been upgradeable. Not so anymore. Alienware started the trend before Voodoo jumped on board, and now Dell is offering upgradeable graphics on its XPS line of gaming laptops. This means that a year from now when the next big thing in graphics technology hits, you won't be left with a 10-pound, $3,000 doorstop. For a few hundred bucks, Dell will send a rep out to your house to swap your old graphics card for a new one.



GATEWAY FMC-901X MEDIA CENTER PC

Manufacturer: Gateway
URL: www.gateway.com
Price: $1,699 (computer only)







IDEAL FOR:

Gateway's FMC-901X Media Center PC is designed for those of you out there who aren't afraid to have a PC as the center of your home entertainment system. The FMC is like the Swiss army knife of computers: It's a PC, DVD player, TiVo-style digital video recorder (DVR), and MP3 jukebox all in one.

GOES BEST WITH:

While the machine is powerful enough to run any game currently available (or coming down the pike, for that matter), you'll find that certain games just work better from the comfort of your couch. We played a ton of *Madden NFL 2004, Need for Speed Underground,* and Ubisoft's latest flight sim, *Lock-On Modern Air Combat.* We used Logitech wireless controllers, and the experience was awesome.

IT'S COOL BECAUSE:

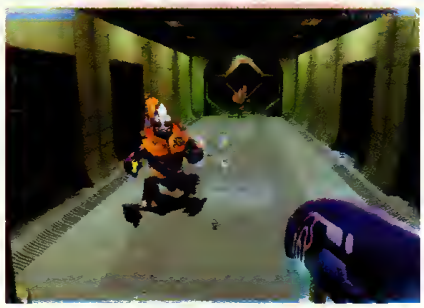
Essentially a killer PC in AV clothing, the FMC-901X replaces that stack of black boxes with one do-it-all component. Oh yeah, and you can say good-bye to those monthly TiVo fees.

PC



VOODOO HEXX

Manufacturer: Voodoo
URL: www.voodoopc.com
Price: $2,500 (with 19-inch monitor & surround-sound speakers)





IDEAL FOR:

With its custom case and 64-bit AMD processor, the Hexx is made for the PC gamer who wants style and power.

GOES BEST WITH:

The Hexx rocks 1GB of memory as well ATI's 256MB Radeon 9800 XT graphics card. There isn't a game that this baby won't run. Its powerful combination of graphics technology and that monster AMD Athlon 64 3000+ processor means that this machine will dominate in games that tax the CPU and graphics card simultaneously—all you *Halo* and *Painkiller* fans out there can crank the resolution without the games turning into slide shows.

IT'S COOL BECAUSE:

Its sleek design means you can proudly display your PC. Hell, even the Mac snobs here were drooling over it. But looks aside, Voodoo designed the case so that the power supply cools the overclocked graphics card and CPU.

One Vote. One Award. Two Players.

Win a chance to kick it with Method Man and Redman at G-Phoria, the Award Show 4 Gamers. Go to your local EB Games or EBgames.com/vote and vote for the EB Gamers Choice Award and you'll be automatically entered to win a trip to G-Phoria in Los Angeles to meet Method Man and Redman, stars of the new FOX comedy series "Method and Red."



No purchase necessary. Void where prohibited. For official contest rules go to www.g4tv.com/methandred. Jeep is a registered trademark of DaimlerChrysler

RIDDICK RETURNS

XB

ACTOR VIN DIESEL HEADS INTO PITCH-BLACK TERRITORY WITH HIS FIRST GAME, THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY

In the sci-fi flick *Pitch Black*, Vin Diesel made quite an impression on audiences as the antihero Riddick. It obviously made an impression on Vin himself, as he's now reprising the Riddick role in both a movie sequel—this summer's *The Chronicles of Riddick*—and in a videogame prequel, Xbox shooter *The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay*. The game is being copublished by Vin's own videogame company, Tigon Studios, along with Vivendi Universal. *GMR* had a chance to chat with the movie-star-cum-game-developer about his recent career change.

GMR: Besides providing Riddick's voice and likeness for *Butcher Bay*, how else have you been involved in the game's design?

Vin Diesel: Because it was important that the game ties in closely with *Pitch Black*, I was involved in all aspects of the story, from the direction and the writing of the dialogue to the character design.

GMR: How was doing Riddick's voice for this game different from when you did the voice of the robot in *The Iron Giant*?

VD: I had a different connection to the material. As one of the producers of the game, I was actively involved in the creation of the dialogue and developing the character.

GMR: Was it always your plan to start Tigon off with a game based on one of your movies?

VD: I had been formulating my plan to start Tigon Studios before I was ever approached by a game publisher. So when *Escape From Butcher Bay* went into development, it was an obvious step to be involved in it. Though *Butcher* actually started off as a *Pitch Black* game before the *Chronicles of Riddick* film went into production, which meant we were able to create a connection to the *Riddick* movie through cinematic design, a strong story, and character development.

GMR: What other games does Tigon have in the works?

VD: We're currently developing a series of titles, none of which are based on movies. One's called *Perrone*, which is based on a true story about a cop in the South Bronx; the other is an epic fantasy game.

GMR: Has there been any talk of doing a game with you as the star, à la Jet Li's *Rise to Honor*?





IDOL CHATTER

a conversation with Vin Diesel



VD: I have been approached with similar concepts, but it really boils down to what the game is, what the story is, and if it makes sense that I star in the game.

GMR: When it comes to games you play, are you more of a *Mario* or a *Grand Theft Auto* kind of guy?

VD: *Grand Theft Auto*, though I play lots of different types of games. I've always been an avid gamer, so if the game is great, I'll play it. My favorite genre is fighting, but I like everything from first-person shooters to extreme sports.

GMR: So what's more your style: gaming solo or in the company of friends?

VD: I like competitive multiplayer games. One of the greatest things about videogames is that you can play with your friends and your family. It's always exciting when you're competing against your friend...and you're winning.

GMR: As a videogame fan, what's been the most interesting thing about being so involved in a game's design?

VD: The challenge of telling a story in an interactive medium. It's an incredibly fun medium to play in because you don't have to tell a story in two hours. Designing a game also allows you to explore the outermost reaches of your imagination without the restrictions that are placed on you in film due to costly budgets.

GMR: So what have you been playing lately?

VD: Of course, *Butcher Bay*. I have the latest build, and I'll tell you right now: It's insane! I'm also a huge fan of *Soul Calibur II*, *Grand Theft Auto*, and *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*. But I'm an avid gamer, so if the game is great, I'll play it.

NOW

Clocking in at a paltry 12 pages, this month's reviews section might seem a little light. Apparently, nobody learned from last year's *BG&E* sales disaster that releasing all of their games in November and December isn't necessarily the best thing to do. In case we haven't said it before (we have, numerous times): PEOPLE BUY GAMES IN THE SUMMER!

HOW WE RATE

WARNING!! WHERE MULTIPLE VERSIONS OF A GAME ARE REVIEWED, *GMR* WILL MENTION DIFFERENCES ONLY IF THEY SIGNIFICANTLY AFFECT THE GAMEPLAY!

YOUR GUIDE TO THE GMR SCORING SYSTEM

1 AWFULNESS 2 DASTARDLY 3 PITIFUL 4 OOPS 5 AVERAGE 6 GOOD STUFF 7 RECOMMENDED 8 EXCELLENT 9 TOTALLY SICK 10 TIMELESS CLASSIC

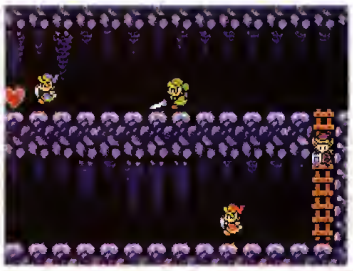
REVIEWED THIS ISSUE:

FRONT MISSION 4	PS2	091
FUTURE TACTICS: THE UPRISING	GC/PS2/XB	090
GALACTIC WRESTLING: FEATURING ULTIMATE MUSCLE	PS2	090
LA PUCELLE: TACTICS	PS2	085
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES	GC	083
MANHUNT	X8	089
MARIO GOLF: ADVANCE TOUR	GBA	087
MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG	GBA	089
METAL SLUG 3	XB	087
PAINKILLER	PC	086
RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2	X8	088
RED DEAD REVOLVER	PS2/XB	093
RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS	PC	086
SHINING FORCE: RESURRECTION OF THE DARK DRAGON	GBA	092
SHREK 2: THE GAME	GC/PS2/XB	085
UFC: SUDDEN IMPACT	PS2	092



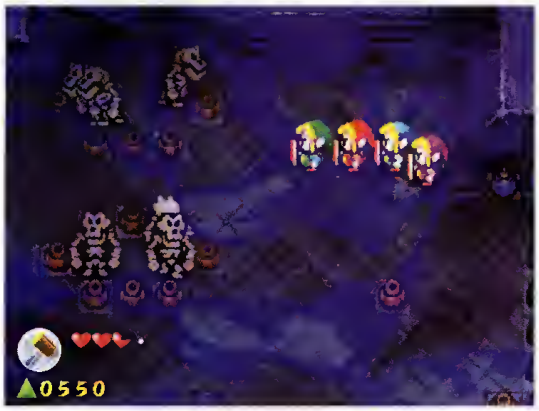






→ Certain areas in the GBA portion go into a platform-esque side viewpoint that may remind some players of the action portions in *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link* for NES. Many items, such as this heart container, are tucked away down below.

→ The fog effect seen below is one of many special effects provided by the GameCube hardware not possible on the Super NES or Game Boy Advance.





GC

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES

FOUR TIMES THE FUN?

EVERYONE | GC

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: JUNE
PLAYERS: 1-4
ORIGIN: JAPAN

While action games like *Halo* push cooperative play in new genres, it's been years since anyone did a good co-op action-RPG in the vein of *Secret of Mana*. In conjunction with *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles*, *The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Adventures* suddenly makes GameCube the place to go for cooperative high jinks. You may hear a lot of talk about GBA connectivity features, 2D graphics, and minigames, but remember this: The backbone of *Four Swords* is its co-op play.

Nearly all the gameplay—from solving puzzles to making progress to fighting bosses—revolves around the title's team aspects. You often have to use all four Links to push or pull buildings or boulders, lift up barriers to find secret paths, or hit switches simultaneously. And since each Link is a different color, many puzzles and boss fights focus around these colors—for example, you may be able to reflect an attack back at a boss only if you are the same color as your foe.

In action, all these elements work extremely well. Since you know going in that every puzzle in some way revolves around using all four characters, the gameplay makes sense. Need to burn down an ice wall? Line up all four Links with flamethrowers. Need to move a house? Push it with the combined strength of the four. There's one odd scene in which you can't throw a boomerang through metal statues—though you can throw it through a solid wall from a different room altogether—but such inconsistencies are rare. Most of the gameplay mechanics are cleverly designed and fit in with the multiplayer concept.

There's a good variety of level designs, too. Over the course of eight levels, you fight through quicksand in the desert, slide across ice with a snowstorm around you, and even make your way out of a chaotic things-fall-apart-style level toward the end that truly pushes the special effects.

Since there are four characters on





[LOSING TRACK]

THANKS FOR NOTHING. NO. REALLY!

It's never cool to get a lesser version of a game, so when Nintendo announced that Tetra's Trackers—one of two default minigames in the Japanese version of *Four Swords Adventures*—would be cut from the U.S. release, fans were disappointed. But how much are we missing, really? The mode would give the game more replay value, but it also is the most criticized element of the Japanese version. In our time with the Japanese game, these matches (which have everyone running around trying to get to the next goal first) lasted way too long and were more tiring than exciting.



GC

→ This formation is especially handy for combat, as the four Links can spin rapidly and get all Cuisinart.







the screen at the same time, it may seem like you lack the freedom to go where you want, and this is where that dirty word "connectivity" comes in. Should you see a hole, you can go in it and continue to play on your GBA screen. You can't make significant progress on your own since the team needs to stick together, but connectivity opens up the world quite a bit and works well...if you can afford it (the game requires each player to have a GBA and a link cable).

With an obvious focus on connectivity and cooperation, *Four Swords* wasn't necessarily meant to be a single-player game, but you can play it that way if you wish. To substitute for the GBA, a picture-in-picture screen pops up on the television, and you're able to use the GameCube controller, although playing this way isn't quite as satisfying. You control the four Links together (three of them follow every step you take), but if you want to hit four switches, you have to control each character and move them into position, which slows down the pace.

Even if you speed up and play with friends, though, the game still has a problem with time: It's over too quickly. Since the single-player game is all about puzzle solving and is extremely easy—you build up more than enough bonus-life fairies to save yourself over and over, and you continue from right where you die—there's little pulling you back to play after you beat the main quest, which can be completed in a mere couple of days.

Nintendo put together a fantastic cooperative quest, but compared to most single-player games, it's short, and compared to most multiplayer games, there's little reason to go back once you've played through it.

_Matt Leone

GMR FOUR SCORE **8**/10

ON PAR WITH: FOUR SWORDS GBA
BETTER THAN: TETRA'S TRACKERS
WAIT FOR IT: WIND WAKER 2

2ND OPINION

I enjoy playing *Four Swords* cooperatively, but the basic human nature to compete is sometimes difficult to suppress—hence my throwing of *EGM*'s Shane Bettenhausen at the feet of a boss and then collecting his former fortune from his fallen remains. Good times, indeed.

_Andrew Pfister

LA PUCELLE: TACTICS

SIMPLY DIVINE

TEEN | PS2

The best thing about Nippon Ichi's games is the way they strike such a good balance between accessibility and depth, and *La Pucelle* is another good example of this philosophy. Simpler than *Disgaea*, newcomers to the genre can still get their feet wet, while veterans can splash around however much they want.

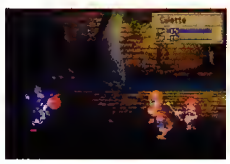
There are several enhancements to the basic isometric grid gameplay you normally find in strategy-RPGs, but the most interesting one is the ability to recruit enemies and turn them on their old comrades even while the battle is still going. An easy-to-use ability system is also nice for eliminating traditional character classes without sacrificing flexibility; the equipment system is similarly straightforward.

Lest the hardcore get scared off by all this talk of simplicity, know that *La Pucelle* offers plenty of systems you don't need to touch but can exploit to your heart's content. You can train your captured monsters to optimize their stat growth, get rid of those you don't need by converting them into items, and set up giant combos on the battlefield.

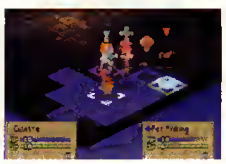
The only minuses are that the story takes itself a little too seriously, and the otherwise fine 2D sprites don't have the giant character portraits during dialogue that helped *Disgaea* stand out so much. But in all other respects, Nippon Ichi has nicely maintained the level of quality that's rapidly making it the developer of choice for strategy-RPG fans. ■

_Nich Maragos









PUB MASTIFF
DEV NIPPON ICHI
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR STRATEGERY 8/10

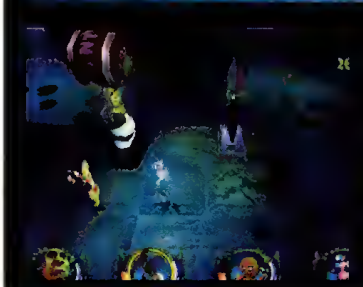
BETTER THAN: RHAPSODY
NOT AS GOOD AS: DISGAEA
WAIT FOR IT: PHANTOM BRAVE

XB

PS2

GC





SHREK 2: THE GAME

KINDA UGLY ON THE INSIDE, TOO

EVERYONE | PS2 (REVIEWED) | GC | XB

Here's a fairy tale where few, if any, will live happily ever after: *Shrek 2* the videogame. Part puzzle adventure, part four-player beat-em-up, part platformer, and mostly schizophrenic, this game drops the lovable ogre Shrek and his many pals into a decidedly by-the-numbers movie tie-in.

At its heart, *Shrek 2* seems to be a children's game. Its fights are tuned for a button masher's sensibilities, and the puzzles are usually accompanied by overly helpful clues issued by a magical mirror. Yet the game contains extended rhythm sequences that become too challenging for most children, as well as some hardcore jumping puzzles that require above-average dexterity. Consequently, the game never maintains a consistent feel or audience; in some places, children will be stymied, and in others, adults will find themselves bored.

Although the game has a single-player mode, it screams to be played with four people. The game's A.I.-controlled characters suffer from Idiotus Mentallus, getting stuck on objects and blocking the player's path. For the most part, this is excusable. But at times, such as during battles with huge bomb-chucking trolls in which players are unable to knock the explosives back to their sender because the path is obstructed by an A.I. character, it is most definitely not. In multiplayer mode, *Shrek 2*'s rough spots are less noticeable.

Whimsical characters move in and out of the story, and this is fine—except for when the "Big Three" of Shrek, Donkey, and Fiona disappear, leaving players to plod along with the fantastic foursome of Red Riding Hood, the Big Bad Wolf, Gingerbread Man, and Tinkerbell. It may be faithful to the film's plot, but having extended sequences without Shrek, Donkey, or Fiona is a carefully aimed shot in the foot, so to speak. ■

_Greg Orlando

PUB ACTIVISION
DEV LUXOFLUX
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $49.99
PLAYERS 1-4
ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR WRECK 5/10

ON PAR WITH: CANNON SPIKE
NOT AS GOOD AS: POWERSTONE
WAIT FOR IT: THE INCREDIBLES



PAINKILLER
SERIOUS SAMUEL

MATURE | PC

Painkiller kind of came out of left field, and given the glut of quality first-person shooters currently out or on the horizon, one might be tempted to pass it by. But if you have any inkling of appreciation for FPS gameplay in its purest form, doing so would be tantamount to treason on your soul.

Fighting your way through hell is a concept popular in first-person shooters, and *Painkiller* doesn't take any serious liberties with it. This is because it doesn't have to. Each of the game's 24 levels is designed with a single purpose—to demolish hordes of demons in the most grotesquely satisfying manner possible, with no lock-and-key BS and hardly any cut-scenes to break up the action. There's hardly any cohesion to the levels, and the enemy designs are fairly random—you'll fight undead ninjas in one level, flying demon priests in another, and crypt hags that explode into swarms of flesh-eating crows in yet another.

This may sound like a complaint, but actually, it's quite the opposite—who needs a narrative when the game you're playing harks back to the early days of first-person shooters with such virtuosity? When playing *Painkiller*, you're entirely engrossed for just the perfect reason: the eye-searing action going on all around you.

The game's physics interact brilliantly with your actions to create game sequences much more memorable than any cut-scene could ever be. Many of the objects in the game are destructible, and they, in turn, interact with objects in their vicinity to create insane chain reactions capable of drastically altering any sequence in a split second. Enemies will flail around when shot, explode upon impact when hit with powerful weapons, and cause the very foundations of the environment to shake—if their girth is impressive enough. In short, *Painkiller* perfectly exemplifies what every first-person shooter should aspire to be at its most basic level—intense, intricate, and destructive. Nothing fancy here...just 24 levels of polished, satisfying mayhem.

_Miguel Lopez



PUB DREAMCATCHER
DEV PEOPLE CAN FLY
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1-16 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN POLAND

GMR 8/10 DEAR LORD

ALONG THE LINES OF SERIOUS SAM
STILL WAITING, DOOM 3
PRAY FOR IT SALVATION

RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS
A NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

TEEN | PC

There's almost enough new gameplay in *Rise of Nations: Thrones & Patriots* for a full-fledged sequel instead of an expansion pack.

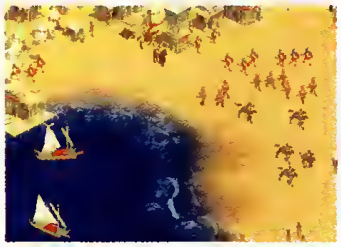
There are six new factions: Americans, Lakota, Iroquois, Persians, Indians, and Dutch, and they bring 20 new unique units. Each faction of course has special powers, with the Persians and Indians on the rampage. Persians have civil research bonuses and free caravans, Indians have cheap buildings, the Dutch are economically successful, and the Iroquois gain benefits in forests. Perhaps with a bit of U.S. chauvinism at work, the Americans seem overendowed with advantages in science, economics, and the military. The Lakota, on the other hand, are severely disadvantaged and cannot build farms. In exchange, they get some meager military benefits.

Along with the factions, there's a new building that seriously impacts gameplay. The senate building allows you to choose governments such as monarchy or democracy for various bonuses for your civilization. Once you build the senate, you also get a character that acts as a respawning general with additional powers.

While the original *RON* focused heavily on multiplayer elements and came with a rather bland single-player "conquer the world" campaign that spanned millennia of history, *Thrones* gives you four highly focused single-player campaigns. They range from Alexander the Great's conquests to the Cold War, and include missions of all sorts, from traditional conquests to espionage missions resembling more character-based RTS scenarios.

Unfortunately, there seem to be some stability issues with the game. Online games can be unstable and even single-player campaigns crash occasionally. Still, they're not bad enough to distract from the great gameplay, and *Thrones* definitely makes the original even better. It's a worthy purchase for anyone who enjoyed the original.

_Di Luo



PUB MICROSOFT
DEV BIG HUGE GAMES
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1-8 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN U.S.A.

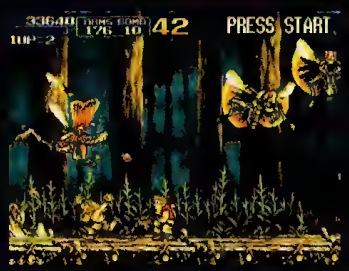
GMR 8/10 EMPIRICAL

BETTER THAN ALMOST ALL OTHER EXPANSION PACKS
NOT AS GOOD AS OWNING AN ACTUAL BATTLESHIP
WAIT FOR IT. STARCRAFT 2 (HOPEFULLY!)









METAL SLUG 3

THE CUTTING EDGE OF RETRO

TEEN | XB

Someone once said that the more things change, the more they stay the same, and in the case of the third dimension, it's getting harder and harder to grab people's attention these days. It's ironic, then, that one of the most striking things you will find on Xbox today is a stellar throwback to the halcyon days of 2D gaming.

The action is predictable: Each of the four selectable characters scrolls from left to right shooting everything in its path, whether it be giant mutant crabs, rotting science-lab zombies, neo-Nazi paratroopers, or giant boss creatures that fill half the screen. What's not so predictable is the brilliance in the execution.

Unlike most games born in the arcade (this game was originally designed for the archaic Neo-Geo hardware), *Metal Slug 3* has surprisingly long legs. Not only is the game unconventionally long for what is essentially a 2D side-scrolling shooter, but the numerous bonus games offered are also excellent fun in their own right. Minigames like Storming the Mothership and Chubby Isle Paradiso are fun skill-based diversions that are engaging to play and hysterical to watch.

If there's any downside to this high-octane old-school thrill ride, it's that there is little else like it. Even the upcoming sequels were designed by a different team, making *Metal Slug 3* truly the last—and best—of a dying breed. ◀

_James Mielke

PUB SNK CORP. | PRICE $39.99
DEV SNK CORP | PLAYERS 1-2
REL AVAILABLE NOW | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR ANIMAZING 8/10

BETTER THAN: METAL SLUG X
NOT AS GOOD AS: R-TYPE FINAL
WAIT FOR IT: VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

MARIO GOLF: ADVANCE TOUR

PORTABLE FORE PLAY

EVERYONE | GBA

***Mario Golf: Advance Tour* could convince the Williams sisters to ditch their rackets and head for the fairways. Heck, Tiger Woods might abandon his own eponymous line of videogames for this combination RPG/golf sim.**

But even those who don't know a birdie from an albatross will have no problem mastering the intricacies of the sport. As golf student Neil, you can take lessons from pros, practice shots, and participate in contests that improve your game. You can also take on course champions in both singles and doubles match games and participate in increasingly difficult tournaments, eventually opening up the kooky Mushroom Kingdom course. As you play, you earn experience points that you distribute between yourself and your doubles partner (it's important to build up her stats, too, because she can save your ass during those tough doubles tourneys).

New areas to explore and conquer are unlocked as you play. There are also quirky side games to entertain you if you get bored of the straight-up stuff, such as Club Slots, which gives you three random clubs to play with, and Go-Go Gates, which forces you to hit the ball through poles along the course to win. And not only is there a quick game mode, it's also painless to save at any point, so you can shoot a hole or two while waiting for the bus.

Plenty of extras round out the experience. Besides linking up for multiplayer games, you can connect with *Toadstool Tour* for GameCube to unlock more features and transfer characters. There's a dictionary of all those ridiculous golf terms. And you can even replay your holes in one, birdies, eagles, and albatrosses.

Because of its masterful pacing, detail, and variety, *Advance Tour* ranks up there with the champions of GBA games. Recommended even if you have zero interest in golf. ◀

_Carrie Shepherd





PUB NINTENDO | PRICE $29.99
DEV CAMELOT | PLAYERS 1-4
REL JUNE | ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR HOLE IN ONE 9/10

BETTER THAN: HARVEST MOON: FRIENDS OF MINERAL TOWN
AS ADDICTIVE AS: TETRIS
WAIT FOR IT: MARIO TENNIS





→ Car buffs who freak out whenever their girlfriend dents their Lancer Evolution be warned: Your car will get very dirty here—caked with mud in England, covered with ice in Sweden, or yellowed by the Australian desert sand. Turn up the damage settings and you may even lose a wheel five miles from the finish.





GMR ESSENTIAL SELECTION

XB

RALLISPORT CHALLENGE 2

IT'S RALLY, RALLY GOOD

EVERYONE | XB

PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CE
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: AVAILABLE NOW
PLAYERS: 1-16 (ONLINE)
ORIGIN: SWEDEN

The Indianapolis Motor Speedway? The Suzuka Circuit in Japan? Pish and tish. The best drivers in the world run 100 mph down narrow British roadways, bumpy Swedish snowfields, and up and down the Hoover Dam. They are the few, the young, the slightly demented. They are rally drivers, and *RalliSport Challenge 2* tells their story.

For those born and raised on *Colin McRae Rally* and other serious sims, *RalliSport 2* will be a shock. The courses are tiny at the start, car damage doesn't affect performance much (by default), and you can drive like O.J. Simpson and still beat the second-place time by 10 seconds. "Sacrilege!" you will exclaim. "This isn't a real rally game!" Several days later, though, once you've clocked a few hundred miles and unlocked the tougher circuits, you'll realize the truth. This isn't a simulation of the rally driver's life—it's a re-creation of the exhilaration of blazing down all these dangerous roads.

Few racers ask for the undivided concentration this one requires. Anything less than total control of your vehicle, and you'll end up skidding into a snowdrift and making do with fourth place. It's a great challenge, and it gets tough near the end—but the lead-up to this difficulty level is perfectly executed, and the amazing graphics, weather effects, and car crashes keep you entertained during the frustrating spots. Even without the full Xbox Live and XSN league support, there's enough game here to keep you entertained for ages.

RalliSport 2 isn't the best rally simulation ever. Instead, it's simply the best rally game ever. It's an important difference.

_Kevin Gifford

GMR MONTE CARLO 9/10

BETTER THAN: COLIN MCRAE RALLY 4
ON PAR WITH: PROJECT GOTHAM 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: A REAL VOLVO 440T

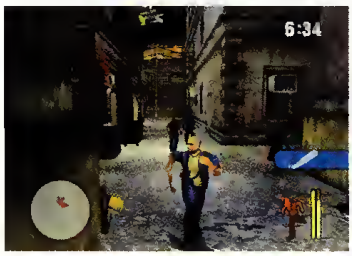
2ND OPINION

RalliSport 2 doesn't so much replicate reality as it does push our perceptions of how real-world physics should behave. Instantly accessible and unequivocally fast this isn't just a game for rally fans. *RalliSport Challenge 2* is a love letter to the genre.

_Che Chou
Previews editor, *XBN*



→ The longer you hold down the attack button, the bloodier the ensuing cut-scene will be. This might be entertaining at first, and the variety of weapons does admittedly keep it fresh for a while. After the 600th time, though, you're probably just going to want to kill the game instead.





MANHUNT
GRAND THEFT STUPID

MATURE | XB

Say it with us: Poorly implemented gimmicks do not make for entertaining games. In the case of *Manhunt*, Rockstar's new action-adventure-stealth-murder game, the gimmick in question is—surprise!—excessive, gratuitous violence. Unfortunately, that's pretty much the only thing this game has going for it.

Manhunt puts you in the shoes of James Earl Cash, a death row convict who's just been granted an unexpected reprieve by a mysterious benefactor—a remarkably creepy snuff film director. This wacko encourages Cash to participate in a gory killing spree, making him pay for his newfound freedom with blood. Lots of blood.

After acquainting yourself with the vaguely *Grand Theft Auto*–esque control scheme, you'll guide Cash through level after level of increasingly chaotic mayhem, playing hide-and-seek with the legion of "hunters" he's been tasked with slaying. Dark corners and alleyways provide cover from their prying eyes, and a clumsy radar system keys you in to nearby trouble. Or at least, it tries to. Most of the time.

As you creep through the various locales, your twisted patron encourages you to carry out gruesome executions on your unassuming victims. This is as simple as walking up behind them and hitting a button; it doesn't exactly make for deep gameplay, and the Xbox's improved visuals over the PS2 version don't provide much salvation.

All told, *Manhunt* plays like a wannabe *GTA* that is devoid of the elements which made those games good. This begs the question: If you want a fun game with a gritty atmosphere and excessive violence, why not just play *GTA* instead?

_Ryan Scott

PUB ROCKSTAR GAMES — PRICE $49.99
DEV ROCKSTAR NORTH — PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR — EAT A BULLET — 4/10

ON PAR WITH STATE OF EMERGENCY
NOT AS GOOD AS GRAND THEFT AUTO DOUBLE PACK
WAIT FOR IT GRAND THEFT AUTO SAN ANDREAS

MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG
APE ESCAPES

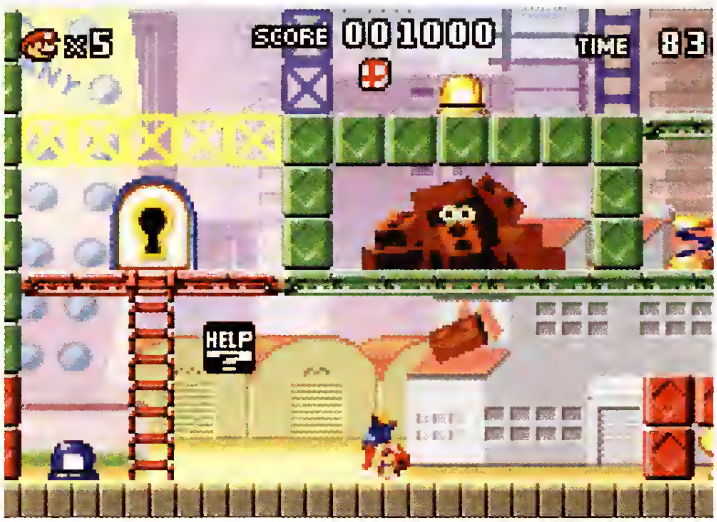
EVERYONE | GBA

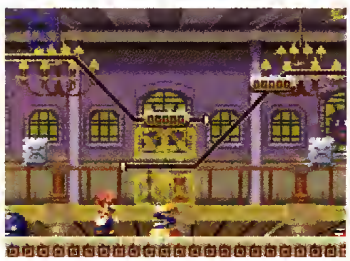
As handheld gaming goes, *Mario vs. Donkey Kong* gets a lot right: simple concepts, easy accessibility, and that intangible addictive quality that keeps you playing for "just one more stage."

The mechanics of *Mario vs. Donkey Kong* are deceptively simple. Levels are split into two parts. The first features Mario locating and securing a key, and then using that key to open a locked door. In the second half, finding a mini-Mario toy left behind in Donkey Kong's haste completes the level. The game switches gears once more when all six mini-Marios are obtained; this level, which precedes the world's boss fight, has Mario leading his toy doppelgangers through various obstacles and hazards to a large toy chest. The concepts of each style are essentially the same (get an object from point A to point B), but there's enough variety to prevent the action from getting repetitive. There's also plenty of puzzle-solving variety throughout the levels themselves: ropes, conveyer belts, elevators, ladders, and three colored switches all provide for many different transportation challenges, and Mario himself has a repertoire of maneuvers (such as handstand double-jumps and sideways flip jumps) that help him get where he needs to go.

Because many stages aren't too difficult to pass, the game might seem easy at first, but it's really a system that favors rewarding good players rather than punishing poor ones. Mastering each stage is a far more challenging endeavor, as attaining the high score requires near-perfect movement and timing. Upon an initial glance at the six revealed worlds, it also might seem like *Mario vs. Donkey Kong* is very short. At the risk of spoiling it, don't worry: You'll likely be saying, "Just one more stage!" for quite a while.

_Andrew Pfister





PUB NINTENDO — PRICE $29.99
DEV NST — PLAYERS 1
REL AVAILABLE NOW — ORIGIN U.S.A.

GMR — OLD SCHOOL — 7/10

BETTER THAN DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
NOT AS GOOD AS DONKEY KONG '94
WAIT FOR IT ASTRO BOY

XB
GBA

XB

PS2

GC

FUTURE TACTICS: THE UPRISING

TACTICS...FROM THE FUTURE!

TEEN | PS2 [REVIEWED] | GC | XB





PUB CRAVE
DEV ZED TWO LIMITED
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $19.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN U.K.

GMR BUDGET 6/10

BETTER THAN: RING OF RED
NOT AS GOOD AS: HOGS OF WAR
WAIT FOR IT: STAR WARS REPUBLIC COMMANDO

Future Tactics: The Uprising heralds a new era in warfare, one in which futuristic combatants wait their damn turn before moving into position, choosing a target, and blasting away at it.

Uprising, a turn-based strategy game with RPG elements, stars an odd band of freedom fighters battling against Earth's bug-eyed alien oppressors in the not-too-distant future. Set out on the battlefield, these hardy souls are given simple tasks: kill everything, destroy something, or reach a specific destination. Environments here are deformable; huge boulders can be shattered or blown into the air and used to crush enemies. Earth can be potholed and the craters used as cover against enemy fire. Buildings will shatter, char, and finally explode after repeated hits. Here, *Tactics* excels at showing the effects of war; environments usually look like pockmarked hells at the completion of missions. At once, the terrain becomes a great ally and a potential enemy; players must use the ground and its mutability to their benefit, and this adds a tremendous strategic element to every fight.

For the most part, goofy fun and challenges requiring excellent tactics rule the day. Still, *Tactics* does a good job of reminding players that yes, it is a bargain-bin title. Its A.I. aliens will sometimes shoot at each other, the camera in the game's third-person perspective is dreadful, and the deformable environments all appear blocky and washed out, the graphical equivalent of the inside of a well-worn shoe. Like the man said, war is hell. Sometimes.

_Greg Orlando

GALACTIC WRESTLING: FEATURING ULTIMATE MUSCLE

GONE OFF THE JUICE

TEEN | PS2

Aki Corporation giveth, and Aki Corporation taketh away. Mostly, it taketh away in this PS2 revision of its cartoon wrestling classic. Though some of what made *Ultimate Muscle* GameCube's guiltiest pleasure is still here, *Galactic Wrestling* is also missing some of the critical components of a satisfying Kinnikuman experience.

Galactic Wrestling's fighting system is completely familiar, with the same responsive, simple controls and preposterous superhero finishing moves. The PS2 version also packs in the same galleries of unlockable muscle-man figurines and roughly quadruples the built-in character lineup, with more than 40 fighters drawn from obscure corners of the Kinnikuman mythos.

Unfortunately, that list segues into the list of what's left out. Gone are the cel-shaded cartoon graphics, replaced with rougher texture-mapped models that lack the same action-figure sheen. The selection of progressive single-player modes is smaller, and the create-a-chojin mode is gone. No more designing your own muscle-man heroes, meaning no more gallery of optional finishing moves to pick from.

If you're a dedicated *Ultimate Muscle* fiend, the lineup in *Galactic Wrestling* has its appeal. The 40-plus characters represent a strong dose of *Muscle* madness, and the four-player game is a vital addition. Even so, if you're looking for a game with legs, you'd be better served by the GC original.

_Dave Smith

PUB BANDAI
DEV AKI CORPORATION
REL JUNE
PRICE $39.99
PLAYERS 1-4
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR KID MUSCLE 5/10

BETTER THAN: BANGING ACTION FIGURES TOGETHER
NOT AS GOOD AS: ULTIMATE MUSCLE: THE KINNIKUMAN LEGACY
WAIT FOR IT: DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NY





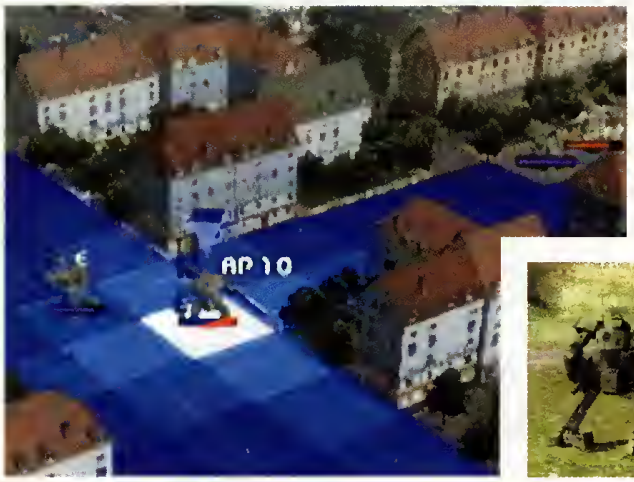














→ *FM4* combines the beautiful battle cinemas of the import-only *Front Mission 2* (PS) with the faster loading times and speedy gameplay of *FM3*—with none of the soapy buildup. This is, in essence, the best *Front Mission* yet.

PS2

FRONT MISSION 4

STRATEGY GETS ANOTHER SHOT IN THE ARM

TEEN | PS2

PUBLISHER: SQUARE ENIX
DEVELOPER: SQUARE ENIX
PRICE: $49.99
RELEASE: JUNE
PLAYERS: 1
ORIGIN: JAPAN

The year is 2096, and the paths of two disparate wanzer pilots meet on the battlefields of war-torn Venezuela. For strategy fans, this is good news. If you've followed the alternate reality of the *Front Mission* series, you know that this means more of the same excellent grid-based war gaming first seen in the States in *Front Mission 3* for PlayStation. This first iteration for PS2 is a beautifully finessed upgrade over previous episodes, but does it add to the formula or merely recycle it?

Immediate evidence suggests the latter, as the initial plow through the game's introductory sequence thrusts the player into a rather bland setup battle designed to familiarize the novice to *Front Mission*'s time-tested turn-based game mechanics, as well as introduce the sizable stable of voice-acted (a first!) characters.

It is extended play among the 3D battlefields (which feature manually adjustable analog perspectives, enabling players to get a better view of things) that reveals the subtle but worthy nuances added to this fourth chapter. Most notable is the new link system that allows gamers to preassign offensive and defensive strategic tactics to allied A.I. Not only does this speed up the gameplay, it also adds a dynamic layer of depth to an already solid strategy series. The expanded variety of environments, equipment customizations, and weather conditions merely serves to enhance the thrill of blowing off specific mech body parts, which are displayed in the cinematic real-time battle scenes. In all, precisely the ingredients this series required.

Front Mission 4 isn't likely to win new converts, but it's guaranteed to please the choir.

_James Mielke

GMR METALLICA **8/10**

BETTER THAN: RING OF RED
ON PAR WITH: ADVANCE WARS 2
WAIT FOR IT: PHANTOM BRAVE

2ND OPINION

FM4 is slow and methodical, with a hefty political narrative to match. To be blunt: strategy-RPG fans are probably looking for something more like *La Pucelle*. That said, the gameplay slowly builds to a unique strategic high. Paying attention to all of its elements will take your mind off the ultralow-budget presentation.

_Christian Nutt

UFC: SUDDEN IMPACT
WE SUBMIT

TEEN | PS2

The first *UFC* fighting game for Dreamcast was quite original: no fireballs, weapons, or kick flips—just two men beating each other up. Unfortunately, despite the evolution of the UFC itself, the series has gone absolutely nowhere.

Sudden Impact, the latest game in the series, gives players an updated roster and a few new moves, like cage mounts, side control, and chaseable knockdowns, but for the most part, it's painfully obvious that the developers just threw on a new coat of paint without correcting any of the game's flaws: The objectives in the story mode are a joke (punch an opponent twice?), and players will spend more time on the loading screen than actually fighting. Creating a fighter is a tedious affair, and most gamers won't bother to actually train one to the point of competence. Animations, graphics, and sound effects haven't changed, nor have any of the game's fundamentals.

Though *Sudden Impact* has the usual types of modes one would expect in a fighting game (tournament, training, story, and the like), the core gameplay still revolves around duking it out in an octagon. Punches, kicks, heel hooks, guillotine chokes, and armbars are still the way to victory, and a match can be decided in literally less than five seconds if a submission is applied. But while the game's ground fighting is adequate, almost every standing technique can be nullified by a single jab, leading to mindless button-mashing.

Though it might not be in keeping with the UFC's ultrarealistic nature, merely giving players the option to fight more than one round to decide a victory would improve the title exponentially. Fans of mixed martial arts combat should choose *Sudden Impact* over other games in the series, but anyone who has played past *UFC* titles will find there's nothing new to warrant its purchase.

_Doug Trueman

PUB GLOBAL STAR
DEV OPUS
REL AVAILABLE NOW
PRICE $19.99
PLAYERS 1-2
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 5/10 PUNCH OUT

BETTER THAN: UFC: TAPOUT 2
NOT AS GOOD AS: RAW 2
WAIT FOR IT: DEF JAM: FIGHT FOR NY





SHINING FORCE:
RESURRECTION OF THE DARK DRAGON

MATURE | GBA

***Shining Force* is a great but overlooked series that deserves a second chance; unfortunately, this isn't the most exciting way to relaunch the series, even if it is the most appropriate. *Resurrection of the Dark Dragon* is a retelling of the first game, which originally debuted on the Sega Genesis in 1992. Although this version is greatly expanded—featuring more story, characters, dialogue, and battles than the original—it still can't quite stack up to the pedigree of its modern competition (namely *Fire Emblem*).**

The problem is that the classic title it's based on was a bit trite even for its time; the story's been inflated, but not really improved. There wasn't a spunky princess in the original, but the stereotype was already firmly entrenched in cliché the first time *Shining Force* came out. It's absolute filler nowadays, just like the game's "ultimate good versus ultimate evil" main plot.

Fortunately, the gameplay is more than a match for it. At its core, *Shining Force* was designed to be a streamlined, beginner strategy-role-playing game for console when the genre was still fresh, and little has changed. If you're expecting the depth of *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*, you'll be disappointed.

But while it may be the simplest game in the genre, that doesn't stop it from being engaging. With an easy-to-understand class system and pared-down battle mechanics, it's a matter of merely positioning your troops effectively, which takes a lot of the pressure off. This leads to a sense of freedom and fun that's very dissimilar to more hardcore strategy games.

If you're frustrated by *FFTA*, this is strategy with training wheels. Even if you're up to the challenge of the harder games, it's like a refreshing breeze blowing through a craggy and sometimes treacherous genre. The truth of the matter is, though, that a stapled-on story and a bit of card battling can't bring a 1992 game up to current standards. An all-new *Shining Force* game will be something to truly celebrate. This is simply a very solid time killer.

_Christian Nutt



PUB ATLUS
DEV CLIMAX
REL JUNE
PRICE $29.99
PLAYERS 1
ORIGIN JAPAN

GMR 7/10 TARNISHED

BETTER THAN: SHINING FORCE CD (SEGA CD)
NOT AS GOOD AS: SHINING FORCE III (SATURN)
WAIT FOR IT: SHINING FORCE (PS2)







→ Red's Dead Eye ability slows down time and allows you to choose multiple areas on a target and then lay your vengeance upon them all at once. While fun, it's only really necessary during certain boss fights and when surrounded.







→ Every now and then, *Red Dead Revolver* takes a break from the free-for-all bloodshed by having you face off against a foe in a good-ol'-fashioned gun duel. If you're too quick on the stick, Red will draw without his gun; too slow, and you'll end up—how they say—eating lead. If you miss, well, just shoot him again.

RED DEAD REVOLVER

SHORT IN THE SADDLE

MATURE | XB [REVIEWED]

PUBLISHER:	ROCKSTAR
DEVELOPER:	ROCKSTAR SAN DIEGO
PRICE:	$49.99
RELEASE:	JUNE
PLAYERS:	1-4 (ONLINE XBOX)
ORIGIN:	U.S.A.

A living ghost of a game that almost never was wanders into town, looking for a stiff drink and some action at the local gaming houses. As proprietors of such establishments, we reply, "Sorry, partner, we don't serve your kind 'round these here parts."

It's hard not to like *Red Dead Revolver*, really. The production team absolutely nailed the prototypical American Western motif—the set design, voice acting, music and sound effects, old-timey film-strip filters, mostly harmless stereotypes, and even the tense, low-angle camera shots used during showdown sequences.

And what *Red Dead Revolver* promises, it delivers in spades: nonstop gunslingin' and bloody varmint blastin'. Red controls well, and aiming is accurate, which is not easy to do in a third-person shooter. Even though the game is relatively short—about a day's worth of play—the levels are paced well. But for all the years spent in the studio, *Red Dead* still could have used some more time for polish: Enemy A.I. borders on serviceable (hordes of nameless and disposable thugs are dumb, after all) and downright idiotic, mission objectives aren't always clear, you can't depend on a head shot always registering as a head shot, and most bosses take damage only under certain conditions.

When Rockstar picked up *Red Dead Revolver* from Capcom's recycling bin, many believed that the company saved what could have been another promising game from development hell. Turns out that maybe Capcom knew what it was doing. We wouldn't turn our heads away from a *Red Dead Revolver 2*—just as long as it got the attention it deserved.

_Andrew Pfister

GMR MILD WEST 6/10

ON PAR WITH: BRUTE FORCE
BETTER THAN: DEAD MAN'S HAND
WAIT FOR IT: DARKWATCH

2ND OPINION

Red Dead Revolver is stylish, short, and kinda sweet. It's just not totally sweet. For the few hours it'll take players to beat the main mode, it's an enjoyable ride, but that's about all there is to do and see here, pard. Rockstar's trademark touches take this game a few notches above average, but not nearly enough.

_David Chen
News editor, *XBN*

XB
PS2

RETROACTIVE

DIG INTO YOUR FUNBAG, KIDS. IT'S FUNKY MASCOT MANIA MONTH! WE LOVE THESE GUYS!

KLONOA 2

BURSTING WITH CHARACTER, BUOYED BY INNOVATION

PS2 | JULY 2001

Viewtiful Joe is the title that's usually brought up as the standard bearer for side-scrolling gameplay in the modern age of 3D. It's true that Capcom's sentai brawler is the most eye-catching 2D game of this generation, but it's not the first—and it's arguably not the best, either. Two years before, Namco had a go at blending 3D graphics and 2D gameplay on PS2, and the result deserved far more attention than it received.

Klonoa 2: Lunatea's Veil is the sequel to the 1998 PlayStation game *Klonoa: Door to Phantomile*. The original title was great fun to play, but PSX cursed its graphics with rough edges and simple modeling. PS2 fixed that, of course, drawing smooth, beautifully shaded 3D characters. It's nothing like the harsh, flashy cel shading of games like *Jet Set Radio*. The game's director jokingly called it "*Klonoa* shading" to differentiate the lighter touch involved.

Technology is nothing without artistry backing it up, and *Klonoa*'s artists showed off a rare knack for character design. Klonoa himself, a fuzzy young hero with ears big enough to let him glide through the air, arguably isn't even the most memorable character in the cast. The supporting stars include some classic opponents in the best cartoony tradition of the early *Mega Man* games and other platform favorites.

Pitching it as some kind of rival to *Viewtiful Joe* is the wrong way to characterize *Klonoa*, though—in fact, the two games complement each other neatly. *Joe*'s heavy on action and flashy effects, while *Klonoa* demands finesse and brainwork. It begins with simple introductory levels and some fun forced-scrolling stages featuring surfing and snowboarding challenges, but the later levels mix in some pretty intense puzzles. Klonoa's ability to grab enemies and toss them around or use them as springboards to hop to high areas leads to stages in which you have just a few targets to work with. Finding the right combination of moves is the key to clearing each screen and moving on.



Klonoa 2's become hard to find since its release. It didn't draw the same hype as some Namco projects, even in PS2's lean first year, and the few copies left in the pipeline have been snapped up by smart collectors. Jump on this one if you ever see it, though, because we're not likely to see this kind of gameplay again. ◀

_Dave Smith



THEN...	A game this good in PS2's first year? What kind of bizarro world is this?	POPPIN' 9/10
NOW...	A lost platform classic that deserves a sequel it will never receive.	FRESH 9/10



THEN...	A 3D adventure that's finally fun to play.	BUN 8/10
NOW...	A fun old-school romp that's still fresh.	RABBIT 8/10

JUMPING FLASH! 2

THE ORIGINAL 3D PLATFORM HOPPER

PS1 | AUGUST 1996

The mid-'90s, for many genres, was a time of transition from 2D to 3D, and some fared better than others. Most acknowledge *Super Mario 64* as the first title to get three-dimensional platforming "right," but among the many failed attempts that preceded it was a forgotten success: *Jumping Flash!*

Jumping Flash! 2 simply builds upon what was established in the first game; you're still a mechanized robot traversing rainbow-colored landscapes and encountering "wacky!" enemies (the belching hamburger is a definite highlight) via a first-person view. The controls are tight, the music catchy, and the gameplay is simple yet enjoyable.

One common complaint upon its release was that the game was too easy, but when compared to today's often burdensome affairs, its ease of play is now a breath of fresh air. It harks back to a time when you didn't need to complete 17 level objectives to have "fun." It's an experience that bears repeating, especially today. ◀

_Matthew Hawkins

BLINX

DOESN'T STINX. WE THINX

XB | OCTOBER 2002





Making a sequel to a game that was generally panned by reviewers and probably didn't sell well enough to break even is either stupid, delusional—or truly courageous.

That Artoon is creating a follow-up to its 2002 *Blinx* garners a slot in the "truly courageous" category. If the original had been reviewed on potential alone, it would have scored 10 out of 10s across the board because it does something no other game had done before or pretty much since: It exploits the Xbox's hard drive to make the manipulation of time a key factor in gameplay. Taking its cue from TiVo and the VCR, *Blinx* lets you pause, fast forward, reverse, and record sequences of the game and use them to take out enemies and solve puzzles.

Here's an example from early in the game: A bridge has been destroyed, but you need it to get across the water. By using reverse, you go back in time to just before the bridge collapsed—you actually see everything happening in reverse. Once the bridge is back up, you can cross it. In another instance, you record your movement for up to 10 seconds. Then when necessary, a "ghost Blinx" appears and replays your previous actions, letting you finish other tasks.

The game's over-attention to its innovations may have led to its failings. You play as hero Blinx, an anthropomorphic cat, and armed with your TimeSweeper, you must thwart the evil Tom-Tom gang from destroying the very fabric of time. In level after level, you suck up garbage into the TimeSweeper and use it to take down time monsters unleashed by the Tom-Toms. The levels (40 in all) lean toward the difficult but have been balanced for the re-release. Unfortunately, some of the level design is dull and confusing, and the camera is simply a mess.

This makes *Blinx* feel like a game that has all the right elements but simply lacks balance. You get the sense that if Artoon (founded by former Sega Senior Director of R&D Yoji Ishii) had had maybe three more months to work out the kinks, *Blinx* would be on a level of greatness. Odds are Artoon wishes it could go back in time and make things right. Fortunately, it'll have its chance with *Blinx 2*. In the meantime, get your practice in on the original. I❤

_Tom Byron



THEN...	Yeah, janky camera, sometimes dull and frustrating—but that whole time-manipulation thing is just plain cool.	MEOW 7/10
NOW...	Still not the greatest game, but it remains fresh. It's a must-try for Xbox owners. The character design kicks *Jak's* ass.	MIX 6/10

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THIS MONTH IN MORE

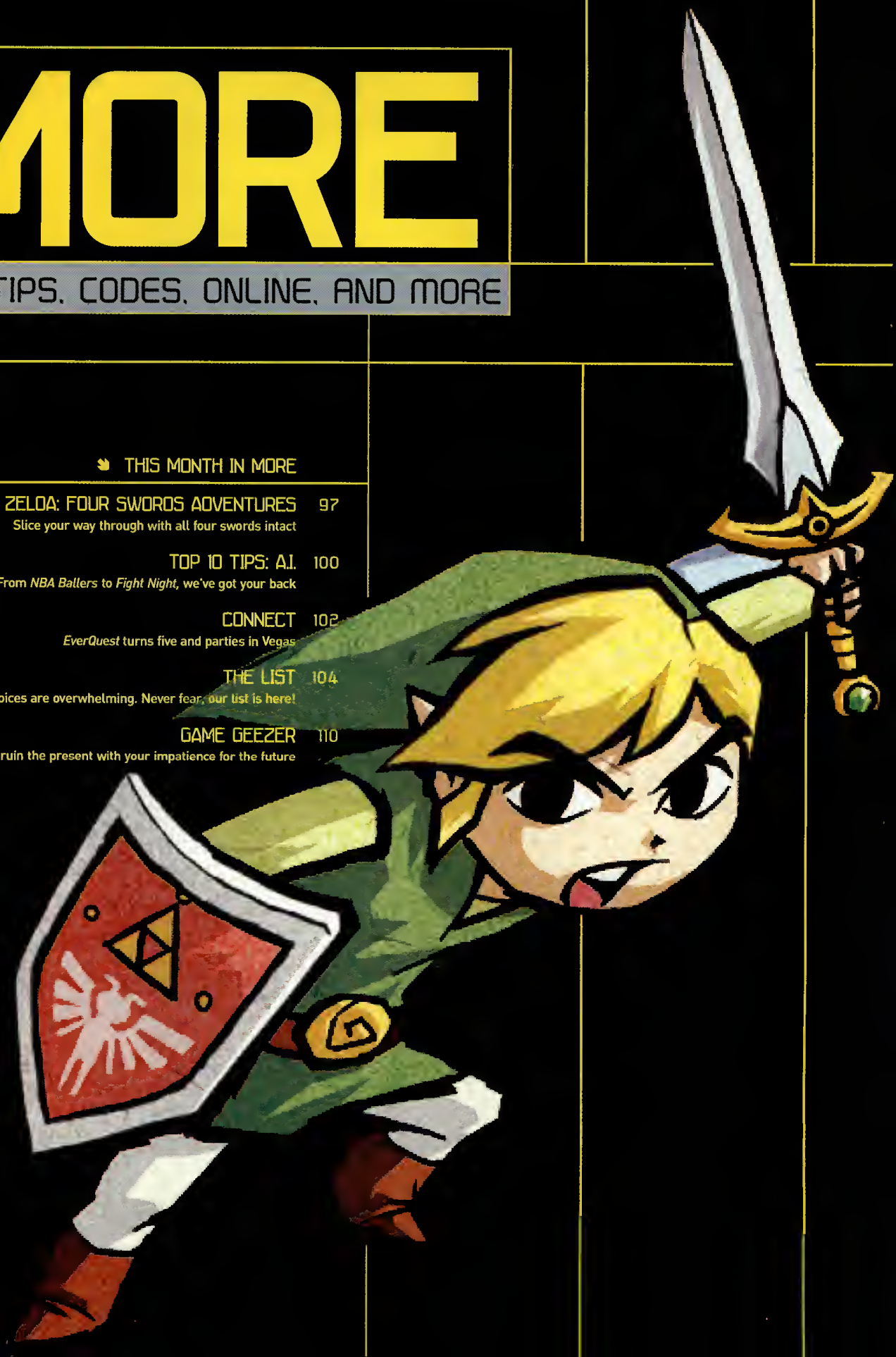
LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES 97
Slice your way through with all four swords intact

TOP 10 TIPS: A.I. 100
From *NBA Ballers* to *Fight Night*, we've got your back

CONNECT 102
EverQuest turns five and parties in Vegas

THE LIST 104
The choices are overwhelming. Never fear, our list is here!

GAME GEEZER 110
Don't ruin the present with your impatience for the future



LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES

LEVEL-BY-LEVEL WALKTHROUGH, JUST FOR YOU

While *Four Swords* isn't a difficult game—you'll earn way more extra-life fairies than you need—there are some tricky puzzles, so we put together this quick-help guide covering every area.

LEVEL 1—WHEREABOUTS OF THE WIND

STAGE 1: LAKE HYLIA

This level runs down the basics: You learn to pick up and push rocks by lining up your Links in formation, you use weapons like the boomerang to grab the house key and the Fire Rod to burn wooden stumps, and you step on switches to trigger certain events, like doors opening.



STAGE 2: CAVE OF NO RETURN

In the room with tons of pots, find a key on the right side. Use the key, then throw one of the Links across the gap to get the bow. In the next room, shoot arrows through the fire and make sure you hit the bridge switch before you kill the bats, or you'll lose tons of Force gems. You'll also come across a minimaze on the GBA screen: Go left, right, right to make your way through.

STAGE 3: HYRULE CASTLE

When you find the house with bombs and a bow, shoot an arrow through the door to hit the switch outside. Later, slice through the blue curtains to reveal doors, one of which will require you to push a throne from the side to get to it. For the boss, hit the energy balls back at him if they are your color and then attack with your sword when he's hurt.



LEVEL 2—EASTERN HYRULE

STAGE 1: THE COAST

Early on, look for places on the walls to place bombs, and they will more often than not create secret-cave openings. Halfway through the level, you'll come across a place where you can upgrade weapons—build up the slingshot to make taking out water enemies easy. When the giant bombs show up, simply go underground or duck underwater to avoid them.



STAGE 2: VILLAGE OF THE BLUE MAIDEN

- Look at the flowers on the second screen.
- Talk to the old man on the first screen to get moon pearl No. 1.
- Take the pearl to the flowers to create a portal but don't go in.
- Get moon pearl No. 2 from the lower-left screen.
- Use the pearl next to the long, skinny house but don't go in the portal.
- Go to the screen on the upper left with the line of people and push the large maid away from the door.
- Go in and get moon pearl No. 3; use the pearl on that same screen.
- Go in the portal and accept the 20-second challenge to get the Pegasus Boots.
- Run into the long line of people to scatter them and get through.
- Talk to the guy in green.
- Go back through the line of people and into the house with a secret side entrance and talk to the guy. Accept the challenge.
- Find and talk to four bucket-hat guys.
- Go back to the guy who gave you the challenge. Select "maidens" to answer him, and you'll get a shovel.
- Dig next to the door of the house of pots and step on the switches to get moon pearl No. 4.
- Go back up and use the pearl between the trees, then go in the portal.
- Get the Fire Rod in the upper-right house. Burn stumps and go in the upper-left house to get the letter.
- Give the letter to the boy on the uppermost screen of the normal world to get the Roc's Feather.
- Go in the long, skinny house and jump over the gap.
- Push the wooden barrels and get the magic book, then go underground and give the book to the magician.
- A house will appear in his same position in the normal world; head through that house to finish the level.

STAGE 3: EASTERN TEMPLE
When you come to a crossway with a block in the middle, first go left to get the key, then go down to use the key, then go up to get the moon pearl, and then go back down to use the pearl and get the bow. For the boss, pluck its eyes with the boomerang and hit them, then use your sword on the main eye as it moves around.

LEVEL 3—DEATH MOUNTAIN



STAGE 1: DEATH MOUNTAIN FOOTHILLS
Near the beginning of this level, you'll come across a house with fire spewing out from every side. Use the Links in formation to move the house over all the stone enemies to get the hammer. Later on, there is a warp on a ladder that seems like a maze, but to get to the top, all you have to do is keep going up.

STAGE 2: THE MOUNTAIN PATH
To light the fuses hanging off the mountainside, get the oil pots from the lower-right entryway on the previous screen. Later, after you push the house away from the cave opening, go to the right and hit the ground hard with the hammer to find a key. For the boss, throw bombs at the bird to make it crash, then head inside and hit its head with the hammer until it weakens.

STAGE 3: TOWER OF FLAMES
You'll come across a guard swinging a spiked ball like in a previous level, but this time there's a ring of fire around him. You should have the Roc's Feather, so just jump over the fire and attack downward. The bosses of this level will be familiar to *Zelda* veterans—they are three dinosaurs that you can attack by dropping bombs in their mouths.

LEVEL 4—NEAR THE FIELDS

STAGE 1: THE FIELD
Get the key from the guy in the unlocked house and use it to get the Pegasus Boots. Pick up the giant wood log at the top of the map and go north to upgrade the boots so that you can run across holes. Next, go to the upper-left area of the map, pull the log away from the holes, leave one Link on the switch in the cave, and run over the holes to get the bow. Use the bow to shoot the spiders and go back and talk to the guy in the red hat to get the shovel. Dig south and slightly to the west of the giant Force gem to find a hole.

STAGE 2: THE SWAMP
In the graveyard, go to the set of graves on the right to get a moon pearl, then use it to make a portal. Immediately afterward, go in the house to get the Power Bracelet, which lets you pick up trees and get to the end.



STAGE 3: INFILTRATION OF HYRULE CASTLE
To avoid the spotlights while in the water, just duck and you will be safe. In the dungeon, get the moon pearl and go underground to get the bow. At the boss, use the lantern to light up the room, at which point you can attack with your sword.

LEVEL 5—THE DARK WORLD

STAGE 1: LOST WOODS
Jump over the holes with the Roc's Feather to get the torch. Head southwest while burning all the stumps until you see a Deku and a portal. Go underground and agree to help. You'll get a list of items to find and take to the Deku in the normal world, but the list will be random each time. Complete the task, and you'll get the Power Bracelet. After you get the shovel, go to the right and dig in the lower-right portion of the screen to find a hole.



STAGE 2: KAKARIKO VILLAGE
Here's where you'll find 10 thieves you need to capture: 1) in a random hole on the screen with the big empty field, 2) and 3) outside the wooden jail, 4) hiding in the trees in the lower-left screen, 5) under the rock in the lower-left screen, 6) in a hole under grass in the house on the right side of the lower-left screen, 7) in the back of the left house on the lower-left screen, 8) under the tree at the town entrance, 9) and 10) under the tree right next to the pen. To get the last three, find bombs in the hole on the upper-left screen (just keep pushing down and you'll find them), use them to get to the chickens, and take a chicken to the old man in the house with the girl outside to get the Power Bracelet. Talk to the man in the house next to the thieves when you finish (move the tree to get in).

STAGE 3: TEMPLE OF DARKNESS
You'll come across a building with bomb markings on the top and bottom—you can push and pull this around to move it over the open gap. When you get to the dark room, go back and get the lamp so that you can see and open a new path. Next to the blue/red switch, push the block on the right up to open the door. When you come across the four oil pots, line up your Links in formation and push against the wall.

LEVEL 6—THE DESERT OF DOUBT



STAGE 1: DESERT OF DOUBT
Once you pass the gate, take the following route, or you'll be sent back to the beginning. Go into the pyramid door (push the minipyramid out of the way), through the hole, right, into the cave, then use the moon pearl and take the underground path. Defeat the enemies, go back to the normal world, up, upgrade your boots, right (over the quicksand), up, left, go through the warp, left, into and out of the cave, down, left (be in formation to get across), through the hole, step on the switches, go into the hole and down through the quicksand, up, up, up, and you're done.

STAGE 2: DESERT TEMPLE
Use the charged-up hammer to find a key in the ground shortly after you get the hammer. Also, you'll come across empty fire pits near the end. You have to maneuver your way around and shoot arrows through the fire to light up all the pits.

STAGE 3: PYRAMID
Use the slingshot in the room on the left to get a key. Use the key to open the room on the right and get the lamp. Use the lamp to light the flame pits in the room on the left to open the door to the weapon-upgrade area. Use the lamp again to open

the first door you saw when you came in to get the Pegasus Boots. Take them to the upgrade center and use the boots to cross the trapdoors in the room on the upper right. You'll get a moon pearl that'll lead you to bombs, which you can then use in various places. For the boss, hit its tail with the like-colored Link.

LEVEL 7—FROZEN HYRULE



STAGE 1: FROZEN HYRULE

Start by heading to the upper-right portion of the map, and at the end of the path, bomb the upper wall to get the Fire Rod. Use the Fire Rod on the ice walls while in formation to get past them. Also, be sure to burn one of the small snowballs to get a house key that'll lead to the Power Bracelet. When you can see the edges of the ladders near the end, bomb on the far left side of the wall to find a switch that makes the ladders come down.

STAGE 2: THE ICE TEMPLE

Early on, there's a room on the right side with a floating platform in the middle. Take the bombs and throw them onto the platform so that they clear out all the skull symbols, allowing you to get the Fire Rod. In the room with different-colored blocks later on, use the properly colored Links to slide these blocks onto their proper switches.

STAGE 3: TOWER OF WINDS

When facing off against the boss, start by going in the upper-right door and hitting the switches to create two extra platforms. Then head in the upper-left door and hit the bird's head to knock it loose. Once it's loose, do some jumping attacks on the eye until it goes down.

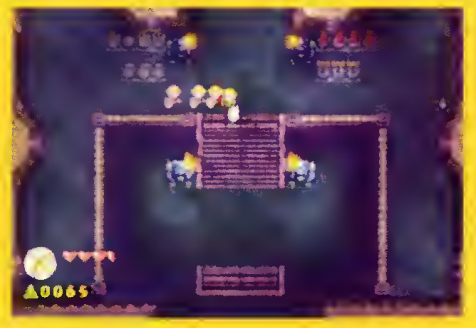
LEVEL 8—REALM OF THE HEAVENS

STAGE 1: REALM OF THE HEAVENS

While there's a bit of backtracking at the beginning, this level is generally straightforward. At one point, you are looking for a key—go down two screens from where you get the hammer and do a charged attack with the hammer to find it.

STAGE 2: THE DARK CLOUD

When you come across an underground area with eight switches, use your swords to hit the four on the left. If you hit the four on the right, enemies will fall from the sky.



STAGE 3: PALACE OF WINDS

Once you enter the main area, get the boomerang and hit the switch in the lower-left room. Then go to the upper-left room and aim down through the wall with the boomerang to hit the second switch. Take the newly opened path and have one Link go underground while the rest stay in the normal world. The underground Link needs to pick up one of the shadows he sees and place it on the switch. Odd, but true. This gives you moon pearl No. 1.

In the lower-right room, take the hammer with you. Make your way down and use the hammer to pound in parts of the three-by-three pattern so that it matches the locations of the pots next to it. Follow the path to get moon pearl No. 2.

For the upper-right room, take a bomb inside and blow a hole in the upper wall to access the weapon-upgrade room. Get the Pegasus Boots and upgrade them so that you can run across the open gap. Follow the path and get moon pearl No. 3.

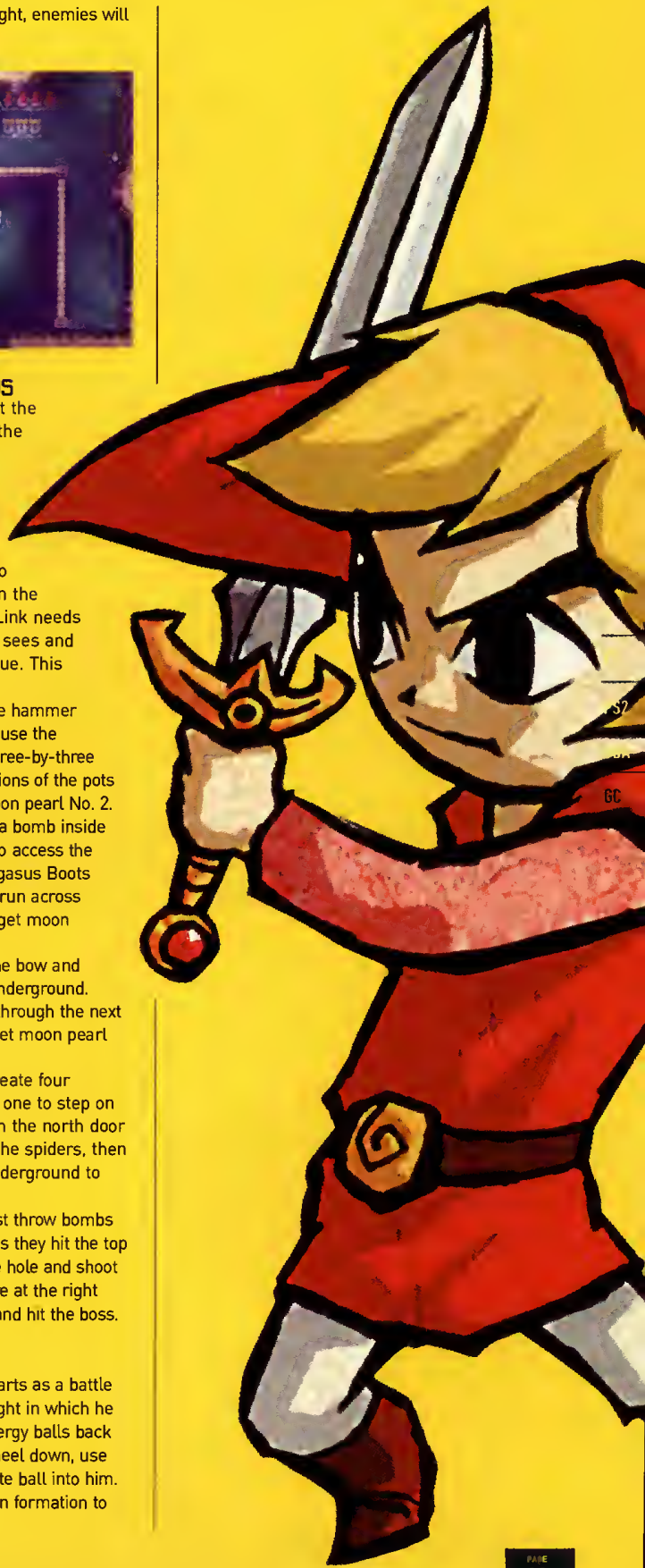
For the upper-left room, take the bow and arrow and shoot all the switches underground. Then head up and make your way through the next room by shooting the switches to get moon pearl No. 4.

Use the four moon pearls to create four portals and send one Link in each one to step on each switch. Then head up through the north door that has opened. Use the bow on the spiders, then take the Pegasus Boots and go underground to get the key.

To defeat the giant-eye boss, first throw bombs into the wind so that they blow up as they hit the top of the spiral. Then fall in the middle hole and shoot yourself out into the air. When you're at the right angle, push B to attack downward and hit the boss.

BONUS: TOWER OF WINDS

The fight with the real final boss starts as a battle of reflexes but then changes to a fight in which he throws out energy balls. Hit the energy balls back at him, and when you make him kneel down, use your bows to shoot the floating white ball into him. Good luck...and remember to stay in formation to make the fight easier!





A.I.

HIS CODES ARE REAL, BUT HE IS NOT

Our A.I. bot would be nothing without our good friends at Prima Games, led by the intrepid codemaster David Hodgson. Or would Prima be nothing without the A.I. bot? Either way, the combination results in cool codes.

01 EA SPORTS FIGHT NIGHT 2004 PS2/XB

What's better than the ol' one-two followed up with a teeth-shattering uppercut? Nothing. Though doing it Mini-Me style is a close second. Give your opponent an old-fashioned beatdown and enjoy yourself in the process with these button presses:





PS2

All venues
Main menu: Highlight My Corner and press Left, Left, Left, Right, Right, Right, Left, Right, Right.

Big heads
Main menu: Press Left, Right, Left, Right, Left, Right, Left.

Big Tigger
Record book: In the Record Book menu, go to Most Wins and press Up twice.

XBOX

Miniature fighters
Main menu: Highlight Play Now and press Left, Left, Left, Right, Right, Right, Left, A.

All venues
Main menu: Highlight My Corner and press Left, Left, Left, Right, Right, Right, Left, Right, Right.

Big Tigger
Record book: In the Record Book menu, go to Most Wins and press Up twice.

02 WARIOWARE INC. MEGA PARTY GAME$ GC

Yeah, we played the minigames in *WarioWare* to death in the GBA version, but GameCube players need more Wario love. You don't have much time in this attention-deficit delight, but here are some time passers nonetheless.

Unlock last single-player door
Get a rose in every minigame in practice mode.

Unlock sound test
Play every multiplayer mode at least once.



03 BREAKDOWN XB

So you haven't been yourself lately? You've had a bit of a breakdown? Well, this game has you punching and kicking like the walls are moving. Wait! They are! After you master this mind tweak, you'll net some pretty kickin' rewards—so to speak.

Gallery	Complete the game.
Music player	Complete the game.
Trailer	Complete the game.
Extreme mode	Complete the game.



04 MTX: MOTOTRAX PS2/XB

Call a cop "Dick," and you'd better be able to make a quick getaway or hope his name's Richard. In this case, you can do a little of both with Officer Dick and his police chopper. Heck, we'll even drop a bit of help off the line for ya. Here's an acceleration boost and some unlockables.

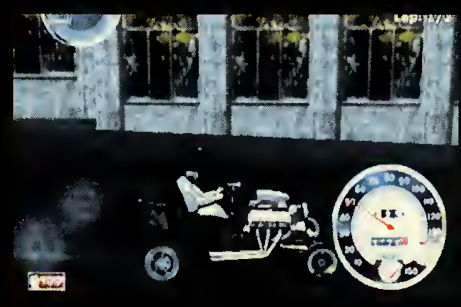
Superfast acceleration	Cheat menu: JIH345
Officer Dick	Complete free ride in career mode.
Police bike	Complete all freestyle events.
Slipknot bike	Complete master supercross.
Speed demon	Complete career mode.
Trick bot	Complete freestyle in career mode.



05 MAFIA PS2/XB

Tommy, Tommy, Tommy. You've become part of the family now, so you can't be rollin' around the city in a beat-up taxi. As a wise guy, you should opt for a nice, inconspicuous classic ride...with a big trunk. How about a monster truck? Hell, you could fit tons of "cargo" in that beast. Here are some lines on in-game action:

Monster truck
Take first place in all of the races in racing championship mode.
Car selection
Learn to break into cars during missions to open them up in free ride mode.
Time of day
Progress through story mode to unlock a day/night option for free ride mode.
City selection
Progress through story mode to unlock more areas for free ride mode.



06 DRAKENGARD PS2

Flying a fire-breathing dragon and torching scores of enemies can be so cliché. Wanna turn some heads at the next battle? Show up on a jet, my friend. That's the *Drakengard* way....

Fly on a jet
Complete the free mission at Shinjuku to unlock the jet. On any sky mission in which you choose which dragon to take, highlight Chaos Dragon and press Down. Select it and start your mission riding a jet.

Hit enemies that are behind a wall
On any ground mission, find a spot with a wall and enemies on the other side. Do a running charge, and you will strike down the enemies.



07 LIFELINE PS2

We couldn't help it. If you can make the poor girl bark like a dog, you ought to be able to see her in some decent clothes. Score. Complete the game to see Rio don her leathers. Tight. Tight like a tiger. Cool....

Unlock extra costume
Complete the game once and save, then start a new game with that game save.





08 NIGHTSHADE PS2

Hack, slash, pose. Hack, slash, pose. If these warriors of the night know anything at all, they know severed limbs and fashion. Bring some sweet gear to the battle and even your favorite Shinobi friend, Joe Musashi. Hey, recently spawned henchman, we've got something for you!

Hisu
Complete the game on Easy difficulty.

Hotsuma
Complete the game on Normal, but be sure to have a *Shinobi* save on the same memory card.

Joe Musashi
Complete 88 stages.

Hibana's second costume
Complete the game on Normal difficulty.

Hibana's third costume
Complete the game on Hard difficulty.

Hisui's second costume
Collect 88 clan coins.



EX mission stage 6	56 clan coins
EX mission stage 7	68 clan coins
EX mission stage 8	80 clan coins
Survival stage 5	52 clan coins
Survival stage 6	64 clan coins
Survival stage 7	76 clan coins
Survival stage 8	88 clan coins
Time-attack stage 6	60 clan coins
Time-attack stage 7	72 clan coins
Time-attack stage 8	84 clan coins

09 ONIMUSHA BLADE WARRIORS PS2

What the *Onimusha* series does right is let you battle with a whole army of characters. Here are some more:

Unlock blue Z part	Beat Phantom Realm 2 using Mega Man EXE.
Unlock green Z part	Beat Phantom Realm using Mega Man EXE.
Unlock red Z part	Beat story mode using Mega Man EXE.
Unlock Zero	Have all three Z parts, then beat Zero in versus mode.
Unlock Giramusaido	Have Musaido reach level 3 or above.
Unlock Gogandantess	Clear the game with Samanosuke Akechi, Kaede, Normal Soldier, and Maeda Keijirou in story mode.
Unlock Jaido	Have Normal Genma/Sword Foot Light reach level 2 or above.
Unlock Jujudormah Ran	Clear the game with Jujudormah (level 3 or above) in story mode.
Unlock Magoichi Saiga	Fight 200 battles in versus mode.
Unlock Rockman EXE	Clear the game with Samanosuke Akechi in story mode.
Unlock Rockman Zero	Use Rockman EXE to collect all three Z parts (red, blue, green).
Unlock Sasaki Kojirou	Clear game with Miyamoto Musashi in story mode.





10 NBA BALLERS XB

With a load of unlockables and juicy button presses, you'll be smokin' big time.

Enter these codes, then press the directional pad in any direction at the Vs. screen:

2X juice replenish	YYYYBBBX
Alley-oop ability	YYYYYYBBXXXXX
Alternate gear	YBBXXX
Baby ballers	YYYYBBXXX
Back-in ability	YBBXX
Better free throws	YYYBXXXXXXX
Expanded move set	YYYYYBXX
Fire ability	YYYYYYYBBXX
Great handles	YYYBBBXX
Half house	YYYBBBBBBXXXXXXX
Hotspot ability	YYYYYYBBXXXXXXX
Kid ballers	YYYYBBBXXX
Legal goaltending	YYYYYYYBBBBBXXXXXX
No weather	YBXX
Paper ballers	YYYBBBBBXXXX
Pass 2 friend ability	YYYYYBBBXXXXXX
Perfect free throws	YYYBBXXXXXX
Play as Afro Man	YYYYYBXXXXXX
Play as agent	YYYYYBBBBBXXXXXX
Play as BiznezMan-A	YYYYYBBBXXXXXXX
Play as coach	YYYYYBBBBBBXXXXXX
Play as secretary	YYYYYBBBBXXXXXXX
Put back ability	YYYBXXX
Pygmy	YYYYBBXXXXX
R2R mode	XXXXXXXX
Rain	YYBBXX
Random moves	YYY
Show shot percentage	BXX
Snow	YYYBBBXXX
Speedy players	YYBXXX
Stunt ability	YYYBBBBBBXXXXX
Super back-ins	YYBBBXXXXX
Super block ability	YBBXXXX
Super push	YYYBXXXXX
Super steals	YYBXXXXX
Tournament mode	BX
Unlimited juice	YYYYYYYBBBBBBXXX
Young ballers	YYYYBBBBXXX



XB

PS2

CONNECT

EVERQUEST TURNS FIVE AND ANTICIPATES A NEW ARRIVAL

ONLINE GAMING

DERRING-DO

I started playing *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow* on Xbox Live the other day, and I've gotta admit, I was nervous. Sure, I've played *EverQuest* and *Final Fantasy XI*, but quietly minding my own rat-whacking business in an MMORPG is one thing. Playing a tactical squad-based game like *Pandora Tomorrow* or *SOCOM II* is quite another—and it's daunting, to say the least. One false move and my online reputation would be forever destroyed, right?

Actually, no. Turns out that, indeed, anyone can play. I'd imagined I'd find all these highly trained supersoldiers who communicated via an elaborate system of encrypted code words while they executed their stealth sniper takedowns. What I found were a bunch of guys really into snapping one another's necks at will. I'm sure those supersoldiers are out there, but all I'm saying is that I was happy to find that there's room for simpletons like me who barely know how to toss a grenade.

What casual gamers probably forget is that, unlike in the real world, people online are, for the most part, pretty darn friendly—especially when you're a total newb and they can show off how much better they are than you. Just stay out of ranking matches (people take those seriously), don't front like you're a pro, steer clear of silly voice masks, and you'll be fine. So go on, give it a shot. The worst thing that can happen is your neck gets snapped...and respawning is quick and painless.

_Jennifer Tsao is the managing editor of *EGM*.

HAIL, A_NEWB_01!

GEEKING IT UP IN LAS VEGAS

NEWS



Time sure does fly when you're camping spawns for XP and phat lewt, doesn't it? *EverQuest*, the MMO that set the standard for many other modern massively multiplayer games, turned five this year—and Sony Online Entertainment celebrated by throwing a party at the Las Vegas Hilton last April.



Roughly 2,800 devoted *EverQuest* players gathered in Vegas for a weekend of *EQ*-inspired high jinks, including attending several developer Q&A sessions, competing in a costume contest, shopping for everything from T-shirts to jewelry, and taking part in a live *EQ* event that sent groups of attendees questing through the hotel for real-life loot. Plenty of after-hours entertainment was also provided, including a wild dance party at a local nightclub. Did you know there are Hawaiian Tropic models who play *EQ*? We aren't making that up.

The convention also featured a room full of Internet-ready PC stations for those in need of a quick *EQ* fix, and for a few short hours, this area doubled as the location of a massive *EverQuest II* demo. *EQ* fans definitely have a lot to look forward to with the impending sequel, including a new race (the ratlike ratonga), a plethora of character-appearance options (think *Star Wars Galaxies*), a refined gameplay engine, and some impressive visuals. Current *EQ* fans need not worry—the two games will coexist, as SOE has no plans to pull the plug on its original cash cow anytime soon.

Let's see...seven expansions, a healthy number of spin-offs, and a monumental sequel—yep, sounds like it's been a good five years for *EverQuest*.

_Ryan Scott

DOWNLOAD THIS!

Every month we pick three of the most interesting or appropriate downloads we come across. Like these!

RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS DEMO

www.riseofnations.com/



The *Rise of Nations* expansion features six new nations, dozens of new unit types, and plenty of gameplay options. You can download the demo online or check out the demo disc packaged with our sister magazine, *Computer Gaming World*.

RICOCHET: LOST WORLDS

www.ricochetlostworlds.com/



Ricochet Xtreme is a fun *Breakout*-style game with sharp visuals and some highly addictive gameplay. The new sequel features even more of this, with plenty of new twists and a handy level editor.

BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH: INSIDE THE BATTLE

www.eagames.com/



EA Games' "Inside the Battle" video series gives players a glimpse of its upcoming *Lord of the Rings* RTS. The most recent video examines the concept of "unit emotion," which makes your army seem more lifelike than ever.

MY LIFE IN VANA'DIEL

A MONTHLY TRAVELOGUE OF ONE EDITOR'S TIME IN FINAL FANTASY XI

MILKMAN



RED MAGE/WHITE MAGE

MAIN JOB LEVEL: 55
SUBJOB LEVEL: 25
NATION: WINDURST
RACE: HUME
SERVER: SIREN
LINKSHELL: ROUNDABOUTS



She said "YES"—although nearly too late to make it into this issue, but in time it was, so let the planning begin (that's your job, Alderon)! In case you missed it last issue, I made an in-column "marriage" proposal to longtime partner-in-crime Wraeth to coincide with *FFXI*'s upcoming wedding services for deeply devoted characters. We're planning on having the service in my home nation of Windurst (surprisingly, Wraeth chose Windy, even though she's Sandorian in origin) at an undisclosed location.

Wedding planning aside (we haven't set a date), this was yet another month of rapid ascension in many areas. Among the month's accomplishments were getting rank 5 (and the ability to ride airships between the three nations and Jeuno), obtaining a couple more pieces of my RDM Artifact Gear (namely, my warlock boots and warlock gloves), and completing the level 50 limit-break quest. The limit-break quest is a mandatory event you must complete to be allowed to rise in level, every five levels after 50. The 50 LB, in particular, requires you to collect three items: bomb ash, exoray mold, and ancient papyrus. While the first two items are "easy" enough to get, provided you have an able-bodied party, it's the papyrus that puts you in the deepest corners of the Eldieme Necropolis, a place deadly for even level 75 players. It took my party days to get the papyrus, but once we did, we became a limit-break machine, acquiring items for a number of our party people, like Keras, Flannelman, Lenneth, Roelon, and Raknor.

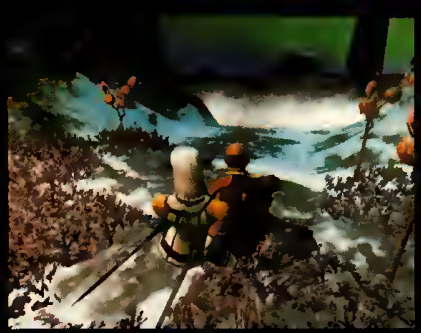
I also brought my Mithra thief, Gyogi, up to level 18, and with the help of Rathsly, obtained all the subjob items in record time. I added Monk to Gyogi's abilities and am now a butt-kicking, gil-farming fiend in the nation of Windurst.

This month saw a flood of new players join *FFXI* since the PS2 version hit. The Roundabouts linkshell has grown significantly, with core members like Plusbee leveling the fastest. Interestingly, the 'shell has adopted a fair number of higher-level veterans from far and wide, making a rock-solid experience-party little more than a *"Hello, Roundabouts!"* away. It's a great group of players, and it's been awesome watching the shell grow. But now we'd like to hear from you. If you like this column (or not), please don't just send me tells about it. Write gmr@ziffdavis.com and tell us your thoughts! —James Mielke

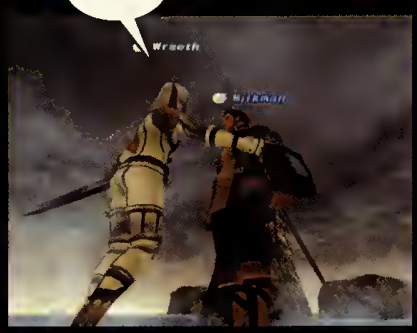
→ "Gimme your Fruit Punches!" hollers alter-ego Gyogi as she puts a whuppin' on the NM, Tom Tit Tat. Below, the pride and joy of the Roundabouts take a break in the Quicksand Caves.











→ Oddly enough, *GMR* managing editor Carrie "Soap Opera" Shepherd was more eager to hear Wraeth's answer than anyone else. Well, Carrie, the answer is "yes." You can break out the Kleenex now.

Yes is the magic number.

THE LIST

GMA'S EXHAUSTIVE GUIDE TO THE ONLY GAMES THAT MATTEA

BUYERS' GUIDE

PS2 TOP 100 SKIP THE SWILL, SELECT THE SUPREME

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
.hack//Mutation	Bandai	We've exhausted our supply of "something within a something" jokes, so just know that the series starts to pick up in this sequel.	8
Amplitude	Sony	A whole slew of new artists who, naturally, bring along brand-new tunes for your button-pressing pleasure.	8
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Interplay	A beautiful-looking *Dungeons & Dragons*–based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.	9
Bombastic	Capcom	Kudos to Capcom for bringing over the excellent *Devil Dice* series. Roll those dice, daddy needs a new pair of DualShocks.	8
Breath of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	An RPG that forces you to die and start over multiple times? It sounds ridiculous, but it actually works.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An aggressive driving simulator that defies the rules of physics. Includes a dedicated crash mode for aspiring demolition-derby stars.	8
Capcom vs. SNK 2	Capcom	Take the best elements of *Street Fighter* and *King of Fighters*, and you'll have the best thing going in the world of 2D combat.	8
Castlevania: Lament of Innocence	Konami	The *Castlevania* franchise goes 3D (again!). It's different from what we're used to, but it's still good.	8
Champions of Norrath	Sony Online	A hefty, highly replayable top-down action-RPG that outclasses *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II*.	8
Chaos Legion	Capcom	Storm through 15 levels of nonstop action, commanding various squads of bodyguards. It's like *Devil May Cry*, only not so antisocial.	8
Colin McRae Rally 3	Codemasters	A superb rally racer with superrealistic properties—right down to the extended time you spend sitting in the Ford Focus.	8
Contra: Shattered Soldier	Konami	After numerous shoddy attempts to bring the classic *Contra* gameplay to a next-gen system, Konami finally gets it right.	9
Dance Dance Revolution: DDRMax	Konami	Before, if you wanted to play *DDR*, you had to subject yourself to Joe and Jane Public. Now you can embarrass yourself at home.	8
Dark Cloud 2	Sony	Improves upon the first one in every way imaginable. Building and upgrading weapons to your liking is a blast.	9
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	Acclaim	Before turning to Larry Flynt for inspiration, *XXX* was based on the well-mannered Dave Mirra and actually focused on biking.	8
Devil May Cry	Capcom	Did you know *Devil May Cry* was going to be *Resident Evil 4* before it was spun off as its own series? Oh, you did? Never mind, then.	9
Disgaea: Hour of Darkness	Atlus	Aside from being a fantastically deep strategy game, *Disgaea* is also the funniest strategy-RPG we've ever played.	8
Dynasty Warriors 3	Koei	Melee combat set in ancient China. Enemies number in the hundreds along branching story paths.	8
Escape From Monkey Island	LucasArts	LucasArts has a fine tradition of putting out excellent graphical adventure games, and this latest charmer is no exception.	9
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top *Madden*.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as *NHL 2K(x)*, where (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
EyeToy: Groove	Sony	The groove is in the heart, but a lot of it is in your arms, too. Watch yourself onscreen—yes, you really do look ridiculous.	8
Fatal Frame 2	Tecmo	One of the downright creepiest ghost stories you'll ever experience. It also doubles as a fun game!	8
Fight Night 2004	Electronic Arts	Pure pugilistic pleasure—terrifyingly realistic with innovative controls. Hit me, baby.	9
Final Fantasy X	Square EA	PS2's first *Final Fantasy* does away with the traditional overworld but introduces full voice acting. Artistically beautiful, as always.	9
Final Fantasy X-2	Square EA	Yuna and company put a fresh set of clothes on *Final Fantasy X*'s gameplay. Hey, ladies!	9
Final Fantasy XI	Sony	This may indeed be our final fantasy—we may spend the rest of our lives here. The social element is addictive to the extreme.	9
Gran Turismo 3 A-spec	Sony	Core gameplay is unchanged, but the graphics get a complete overhaul, which makes *GT3* the best-playing/looking sim on the market.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Guilty Gear XX	Sammy	Tired of waiting for *Street Fighter 4*? This one should more than compensate. Great visuals, great control, and great extras.	8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's *ESPN Quidditch* would be like....	8
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Most of the problems with the original *Hitman* have been fixed, making this one of the more rewarding action games on PS2.	9
Hot Shots Golf 3	Sony	Some golf games need something extra to attract gamers. How about arcade-style control, annoying taunts, and multiplayer modes?	9
Ico	Sony	An underappreciated work of art with challenging puzzles, fantastic lighting, and engrossing character relationships.	9
Jak II	Sony	*Jak II* tries to be everything to all gamers, and it ends up getting a lot of it right, but it's still derivative.	8
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts	Not a cheap cash-in, but not quite *GoldenEye*.	8
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	Can't carry a tune? Seriously, this game is still for you. Bring on the append discs!	8
killswitch	Namco	Namco's action-shooter uses the concept of cover to create battles with intensity. Not that battles usually aren't intense, mind you....	8
Kingdom Hearts	Square EA	When the amazing, talented artists from Square join forces with the amazing, talented artists from Disney, good things happen.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on *The Two Towers* that looks fantastic.	9
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	Anything bearing the valuable *Lord of the Rings* license will sell well. Happily, there's more to this beat-em-up than just the name.	8
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
The Mark of Kri	Sony	A stick action game with innovative controls: Each button is assigned to a different enemy, allowing for combat with multiple targets.	8
Maximo: Ghosts to Glory	Capcom	It's the spiritual successor to the classic *Ghosts 'n' Goblins*, complete with heart boxers and insane difficulty.	8
Maximo vs. Army of Zin	Capcom	Improves upon the original *Maximo* in every conceivable way: better graphics, better camera, and a better pace.	8
MDK 2: Armageddon	Interplay	Much improved over the original Dreamcast incarnation, *MDK 2: Armageddon* is one of the better recent action games.	8
Medal of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	A strong single-player campaign paves the way through the beaches of Normandy and the heart of France. Great audio.	8
Metal Gear Solid 2: Substance	Konami	There's a lot in this update: 350 VR missions, 150 alternate missions, five Snake Tales, and one skateboard. Yes, a skateboard.	9

PS2

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
MTX Mototrax	Activision	Good dirty fun, with an awesome sense of speed.	8
MVP Baseball 2004	Electronic Arts	Includes every AA and AAA farm club and a unique pitching meter—and it looks great to boot. A home run! Heh.	9
NASCAR Thunder 2004	Electronic Arts	It's a lot like last year's version of *Thunder*, only better. Obviously for NASCAR fans.	9
NBA Ballers	Midway	Two-player b-ball where realism is secondary to arcadey action.	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed: Hot Pursuit 2	Electronic Arts	Strangely, the game's best version is on the least-powerful hardware. Running from cops has never been this fun or consequence free.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Street	Electronic Arts	It's like football, except more fun.	9
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's hardly realistic, but it's not supposed to be. It's also the closest we'll ever get to a new *Ice Hockey* or *Blades of Steel*.	9
Onimusha 3: Demon Siege	Capcom	Perfect control, plenty of weapons, nonstop action, and it's pretty, too.	9
Onimusha: Warlords	Capcom	Survival-horror with a taste for feudal Japan, gorgeous artistic design, and a whole lot more action than its *Resident Evil* kin.	9
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando	Sony	*Going Commando* borrows ingredients from other genres and makes a giant casserole of awesome.	9
Rayman 2: Revolution	Ubisoft	One of the best 3D platformers available, the *Rayman* franchise doesn't get the attention it deserves.	9
Resident Evil Code: Veronica X	Capcom	More of a true sequel than *Resident Evil 3*, *Veronica*'s Dreamcast debut meant many fans missed out. Problem solved!	8
Rez	Sega	A fairly standard shooter dressed as a visual and aural masterpiece. Sadly unappreciated by the vast majority of the gaming world.	8
R-Type Final	Eidos	*R-Type* does its swan song with all the joyful intensity you could ask for.	9
Rygar: The Legendary Adventure	Tecmo	This Greek-mythology–based action game is an update of the arcade and NES classic in name only. Fun combat and great music.	9
Sega Sports Tennis	Sega	Arcade-style tennis perfection when it launched for Dreamcast. It's holding up just as well on PS2.	8
Silent Hill 3	Konami	The third chapter of this grisly horror show once again has you running down dark hallways with a flashlight.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	9
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of *The Sims*, but now with branching career paths that will take you forever to finish.	9
Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus	Sony	A solid platformer with a unique aesthetic and animations. Lacks a little in the challenge department; it's a little on the short side, too.	8
SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony	Possibly the best reason to own a PS2 Network Adaptor. The team-based military tactics work better online than off.	9
SOCOM II	Sony	Everything you loved about the first *SOCOM*, now with less of everything you didn't like so much.	9
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4: Evolution*'s.	9
Space Channel 5: Special Edition	Agetec	Shake your groove thing, shake your groove thing, yeah yeah! Includes the original *Space Channel 5* and its sequel.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best *SSX* yet.	9
Sub Rebellion	Metro3D	Customizable submarines rule the waters of the future; *Sub Rebellion* is an action game that's short on graphics but very entertaining.	9
Tekken Tag Tournament	Namco	Essentially *Tekken 3* with enhanced graphics and tag teaming. Which isn't bad, considering *Tekken 3* is a great game to begin with.	8
Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven	Activision	*Tenchu* sneaked onto the list without us noticing. We were drunk on sake and telling tales of heroism, so that might be why.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes, too.	8
Tokyo Xtreme Racer Zero	Crave	Cruise Tokyo's highways in search of less-than-legal street-racing action. Despite some visual issues, it's definitely worth checking out.	8
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	This strategy-shooter's port to PS2 brings simpler floor plans, a less-revealing radar, and automatic saves. And it's still good.	9
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Ubisoft	As expected, the PS2 port of the Xbox original takes a graphical hit. Doesn't mean it's not still a great game, though.	9
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft dropped the two-minute time limit in career mode and added an array of objectives. Level design is a step up from *THPS3*'s.	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of *THUG*'s customizable gameplay make it the best *Hawk* yet.	10
Twisted Metal: Black	Sony	With the franchise safely out of the hands of 989 Studios, *Twisted Metal* makes a welcome return to its former gruesome glory.	9
Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution	Sega	The greatest 3D fighter ever created, and it's only a measly $20. Mow the lawn twice, and it's yours.	10
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the *Tony Hawk* formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9
War of the Monsters	Sony	King Kong's agent wanted a cool $20 mil. for this fun beat-em-up, but Sony balked and went with the less-recognizable Congar.	9
Wild Arms 3	Sony	A grand adventure with a Wild West theme, endearing characters, great music, and a refreshingly uncomplicated battle system.	8
Winning Eleven 7	Konami	Enough tweaks to warrant a purchase, even if you own the last *Winning Eleven*.	9
Wipeout Fusion	Bam	The Designer's Republic touch may be missing, but the series' oft-imitated, never-surpassed style of racing remains intact.	8
WWE SmackDown! Here Comes the Pain	THQ	Much better than the previous *SmackDown!*, *HCTP* improves the previously flawed grappling system.	8
Xenosaga	Namco	A massive RPG with an epic story and length. Namco's now in charge of the *Xeno* series, and this is the first of many planned chapters.	9
Zone of the Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	Better enemies, better pacing, better music, better stages, and better weapons. What we're trying to say is, *ZOE2* is better than the first.	8

[BUY!]

MVP BASEBALL 2004

➔ If you're going to buy one baseball title this year, make it *MVP*. Its pitching meter is sublime, and its looks are unparalleled. Better than peanuts and Cracker Jack put together.



[AVOID!]

SEVEN SAMURAI 20XX

➔ Yeah, it's artsy, but pure button-mashing and a bunch of cut-scenes don't equal quality gameplay. The elegance of the film on which the title is based has been hacked and slashed to pieces.



PC TOP 50 PICK UP THE PACE AND POUNCE ON THAT PC

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
Aliens vs. Predator 2	Sierra	Three completely different first-person shooters combined into one dark and terrifying gaming experience.	9
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn	Interplay	The rare occasion when the sequel to a classic goes above and beyond its predecessor. Can't wait for *III*.	9
Battlefield 1942	Electronic Arts	Multiplayer shooter set in WWII that lets you jump in and out of vehicles (even planes!) while battling dozens of your friends.	9
Battlefield Vietnam	Electronic Arts	Who wouldn't want to revisit those halcyon days of the Vietnam War? Seriously, though, this game brilliantly revamps *1942*.	9
Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	Revolution Games	If you like adventure games that offer challenging puzzles and great visuals, then cozy up to *The Sleeping Dragon*.	9
Civilization III	Infogrames	Sid Meier's classic just keeps rolling along, getting bigger and more complex while somehow managing to remain just as addictive.	10
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	*Invisible War*, much like the first *Deus Ex*, is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	9
Diablo II: Lords of Destruction	Blizzard	The sequel to the ultimate dungeon-crawling clickfest should please anyone who wasted their teens playing the first game.	8
Dungeon Siege	Microsoft	Hack-n-slash doesn't have to be complicated. Sometimes, it can even be in beautiful 3D with no loading time between levels.	8
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	The definitive open-ended RPG epic. Sort of like *GTA3*, but with magic, elves, and all that *D&D* flava.	9
EverQuest	Sony Online	The MMORPG that's so addictive, it makes crack seem like Sanka. Play this game at your own risk.	9
EverQuest: The Scars of Velious	Sony Online	The expansion pack to *Evercrack* opens up new worlds, new characters, and tigers with boobies (finally!).	9
Fallout Tactics	Interplay	Squad-based tactical strategy game (set in the same universe as the classic *Fallout* RPG) that sets a new standard.	9
Final Fantasy XI	Square Enix	If you possess the patience (and the money for the monthly fee), *FFXI* is a rewarding MMO experience.	8
Freedom Force	Electronic Arts	Clever use of strategy and RPG elements helps make this witty comic-book-superhero–themed game one of the best.	10
Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubisoft	This top-notch mission pack makes a decent modern-combat simulation into an outstanding one.	8
Giants: Citizen Kabuto	Interplay	A shooter/strategy hybrid full of weird British humor, unique and beautiful 3D graphics, and naked-lady sea monsters.	9
Grand Prix 4	Infogrames	It's a tough choice for Formula One fans; *GP4* and *F1 2002* are both worthy of your hard-earned dollars.	9
Grand Theft Auto III	Rockstar Games	The poster child for all that's wrong in gaming is chock-full of all that's fun in gaming. And you get to import your own MP3s.	10
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	The PC version of the hit game sports a higher resolution, custom MP3 soundtracks, and mouse-look for easier killin'.	10
Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	An almost perfect blend of action and stealth, it's a humongous improvement over the first game.	9
IL-2 Sturmovik	Ubisoft	Amazingly realistic WWII flight sim covering a region seldom visited in computer games: the Eastern Front.	9
Kohan: Ahriman's Gift	Strategy First	Surprisingly accessible fantasy-themed real-time strategy game that's as much fun in single player as it is against other mages online.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Max Payne	G.O.D.	Despite some corny writing, this überhip noir videogame feels like a movie but plays like a great action game.	8
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault	Electronic Arts	Worth it just for the incredibly intense D-Day mission that almost matches the same scene in *Saving Private Ryan*.	9
Medieval: Total War	Activision	The ultimate historical strategy game has everything from political intrigue to sweeping real-time battles.	9
Motocross Madness 2	Microsoft	It's mud-splattering, off-road supercross fun with this free-wheeling dirt-bike simulator from the makers of *ATV Offroad Fury*.	9
NASCAR Racing 2003	Vivendi Universal	It's the final installment of the series, and it's also the best. There's not much new, but everything's been tweaked to near perfection.	9
Neverwinter Nights	Infogrames	If you're a *D&D* nerd, then you already know, but buy this one especially for the multiplayer and user-made mods.	9
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	Atari	This *Neverwinter Nights* expansion has almost enough content to qualify as a new game itself.	8
No One Lives Forever	Vivendi Universal	Austin Powers ain't got nothing on Cate Archer, the hottest digital chick with a gun since that old hag Lara Croft.	9
No One Lives Forever 2	Vivendi Universal	As funny and stylish as the original '60s spy spoof (if that's even possible), and more fun to play, too.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Codemasters	The first in the highly original series of combat sims, this soldier/flight/tank sim went on to win *CGW*'s 2001 Game of the Year award.	9
Operation Flashpoint: Resistance	Codemasters	Features and content worthy of a brand-new game, this is a benchmark expansion for a classic overlooked game.	9
Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield	Ubisoft	The command interface and character A.I. have been revamped, but it runs slowly on anything but a high-end rig.	8
Rise of Nations	Microsoft	It's not the greatest RTS game we've played, but the nation-building aspect makes *Rise of Nations* especially appealing.	8
Sid Meier's Sim Golf	Electronic Arts	*Sim Golf* will have you laying out golf courses and building resorts like a virtual Robert Trent Jones.	8
Silent Storm	Encore	Old-school turn-based gameplay meets new-school 3D destructibility.	9
The Sims	Electronic Arts	It's impossible to categorize EA's addictive superblockbuster life simulator, just like it's impossible to stop playing it.	10
The Sims: Hot Date	Electronic Arts	Gamers everywhere, rejoice! Finally, a game where you can actually learn a thing or two about interacting with the opposite sex!	9
Star Wars Jedi Knight II: Jedi Outcast	LucasArts	Yeah, the lightsaber battles are sweet, but Lando's cameo just about seals the deal. And is his ship fly or what?	9
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the *Star Wars* franchise since *The Empire Strikes Back*. And the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TOCA Race Driver 2	Codemasters	The sheer variety of vehicles to race is impressive; the physics and multiplayer game are icing.	8
Tron 2.0	Buena Vista	For our younger readers, we recommend renting the original *Tron*, waiting 20 years, and then playing this game.	8
Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	New weapons, new game modes, and crazy vehicles = FPS gaming joy.	8
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Vivendi Universal	Adds a single-player campaign to *WarCraft III* that isn't so moody and serious. There are some new multiplayer units as well.	8
Warlords Battlecry II	Ubisoft	RTS and RPG, two great flavors that go well together—especially when combined with a big, gnarly wizard's staff!	8

[BUY!]

UNREAL TOURNAMENT 2004

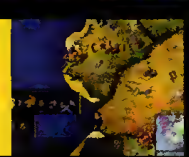
Unreal's back with 100-plus maps, an in-HUD map, tightened controls, and lots of modes—including the amazing centerpiece: onslaught mode. Boom!



[AVOID!]

TWO THRONES

Strategy First's attempt at dumbing down *Europa Universalis* for the masses is so shallow it barely covers your toes.



XBOX TOP 50 XCITING, XTRASPECIAL XCELLENCE

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
Armed & Dangerous	LucasArts	Tea-drinking robots and guns that fire sharks. What else could you possibly ask for?	9
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	Vivendi Universal	A beautiful-looking *Dungeons & Dragons*–based hack-n-slash that can be played cooperatively with another player.	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.	9
Breakdown	Namco	A first-person action game with near-perfect controls results in standout punching, kicking, shooting, and backflipping.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	An arcade racer with an emphasis on spectacular crashes, which—now that we think about it—defeats the purpose of competitive racing.	8
Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge	Microsoft	The single-player mode might last you a day, but the online dogfighting lasts for an eternity. Or maybe just a few months.	8
Dead or Alive: Xtreme Beach Volleyball	Tecmo	Pro tip: When playing *DOAXBV*, have your TV remote handy. If Mom bursts in, hit the surf button and flip to the History Channel. She'll be proud.	8
Deus Ex: Invisible War	Eidos	*Invisible War*, much like the first *Deus Ex*, is a game whose better moments far outweigh its lesser ones.	9
The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind	Bethesda	An exhaustive open-ended RPG that essentially allows you to make it up as you go along, with hundreds of people to talk to.	8
ESPN NBA Basketball	Sega	It's the best-looking basketball game this year, and it's marginally the best-playing one, too.	8
ESPN NFL Football	Sega	The new first-person mode is an interesting addition to a solid game of football, but it's still not enough to top *Madden*.	8
ESPN NHL Hockey	Sega	The game formerly known as *NHL2K*(x), where (x) is the last digit of the year we're in. Oh yeah, it's still really good.	8
Fight Night 2004	Electronic Arts	Pure pugilistic pleasure—terrifyingly realistic with innovative controls. Hit me, baby.	9
Grand Theft Auto: Double Pack	Rockstar Games	Containing both *Grand Theft Auto III* and *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*, this is the value of the year. Now go get your mob on.	10
Halo	Microsoft	The definitive reason to own an Xbox. There are plenty of secondary reasons, sure, but no Xbox owner should be without *Halo*.	10
High Heat 2004	3DO	The best baseball game available this year. "Simulation" doesn't seem like a strong enough word to describe it.	9
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts	Not a cheap cash-in, but not quite *GoldenEye*.	8
Jet Set Radio Future	Sega	*Jet Set Radio Future* has substance and an overabundance of style. Sega simplified tagging in favor of a more robust trick system.	8
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on *The Two Towers* that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
MechAssault	Microsoft	It's a good single-player game, but it really shines on Xbox Live, where you're pitted against other mech pilots.	8
MotoGP 2	THQ	What we said: "Can only be described as the best motorcycle-racing sim on the planet." What more do you need?	9
MTX Mototrax	Activision	Good, dirty fun with an awesome sense of speed.	8
MVP Baseball 2004	Electronic Arts	Includes every AA and AAA farm club and a unique pitching meter—and looks great to boot. A home run! Heh.	9
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of *Live*? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	9
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Street	Electronic Arts	It's like football, except more fun.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
Ninja Gaiden	Tecmo	Itagaki's long-awaited and much-anticipated ode to the ninja is absolutely stunning.	9
Otogi: Myth of Demons	Sega	*Otogi* boasts some of the finest artistic touches you'll find on Xbox. Oh, the slice-n-dice, destroy-everything gameplay is fun, too.	8
Panzer Dragoon Orta	Sega	Aesthetically beautiful and a dream to play. See what Saturn owners were enjoying seven years ago (the original *Panzer Dragoon* is included).	9
Phantom Crash	Phantagram	Xbox certainly isn't lacking in mech titles. The quirky, unique *Phantom Crash* has upgradeable mechs and a story-driven one-player mode.	9
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Project Gotham Racing 2	Microsoft	A great racer with the best implementation of online features to date. Plus, Geometry Wars!	9
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best *SSX* yet.	9
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	LucasArts	The best thing to happen to the *Star Wars* franchise since *The Empire Strikes Back*, and the best RPG we've played in years.	10
Steel Battalion	Capcom	If you want to play this game, you'll have to shell out $200 for the massive controller. For those with the cash, it's well worth it.	8
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4: Evolution*'s.	8
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Everything good about the (PS2) original is here, with loads of new multiplayer options, including maps, weapons, and game modes.	8
TOCA Race Driver 2	Codemasters	The sheer variety of vehicles to race is impressive; the physics and multiplayer game are icing.	8
Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubisoft	Tactical shooting at its almost best. Best played cooperatively over the Net with some friends. Or sworn enemies.	8
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow	Ubisoft	The brilliant multiplayer game—two spies versus two mercenaries—makes up for the brutally difficult single-player game.	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of *THUG*'s customizable gameplay make it the best *Hawk* yet.	10
Top Spin	Microsoft	Microsoft liked *Virtua Tennis* so much, it went and made its own version...and it's better.	9
Unreal Championship	Atari	Mindless deathmatching with great weapon design and entertaining multiplayer modes, including the sportlike bombing run.	8
Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	A surprisingly stellar extreme-sports title that manages to make the *Tony Hawk* formula work on water. Watch out for the gators.	9

[BUY!]

FIGHT NIGHT 2004

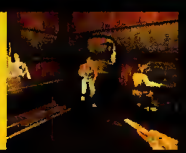
➔ Its innovative controls—using two analog sticks and two triggers—feel like the real deal, but you'll emerge bruise free.



[AVOID!]

DEAD MAN'S HAND

➔ The dead man can keep his hand, his foot, and all his other parts. This game needs to be shot at 20 paces.



GAMECUBE TOP 50 GREAT GAMECUBE GAMES GALORE

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
Animal Crossing	Nintendo	The game that never ends is based largely on routine chores, yard work, and interior decorating. So why is it so much fun to play?	8
Beyond Good & Evil	Ubisoft	*Rayman* creator Michel Ancel has done it again: *BG&E* is a spectacular adventure.	9
Billy Hatcher and the Giant Egg	Sega	Sonic Team cracked a few eggs and whipped up a great new platformer. Yeah, that was lame. Sorry.	8
Burnout 2: Point of Impact	Acclaim	The best-looking—and best-playing—racer on the system. Be prepared to spend many hours in crash mode.	8
Custom Robo	Nintendo	It's like cockfighting, except with robots. Giant robots that you can customize. It has nothing to do with roosters whatsoever.	8
Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem	Nintendo	This game, if you let it, will mess with your head. The insanity effects are clever (the first time), and the scenery is downright creepy.	8
F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Unfortunately, *F-Zero GX* doesn't include vomit bags. Or the *AX* arcade machine. One of those would have been nice.	9
Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	A true *Final Fantasy*? It matters not. This action-RPG is fantastic when played with friends.	8
Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	J.K. Rowling's fantasy sport is surprisingly playable in videogame form. We wonder what Sega's *ESPN Quidditch* would be like....	8
Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Natsume	Fun game, but does anyone else think it's strange that you can nuzzle your farm animals but not your wife?	8
James Bond 007: Everything or Nothing	Electronic Arts	Not a cheap cash-in, but not quite *GoldenEye*.	8
The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	It looks and feels like the best *Zelda* game ever, but sailing back and forth in the overworld just feels like work.	9
The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King	Electronic Arts	The series concludes with EA's best *LOTR* effort, an improvement on *The Two Towers* that looks fantastic.	9
Madden NFL 2004	Electronic Arts	New this year is the Playmaker system of adjusting plays as they happen, as well as a comprehensive owner mode.	9
Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	The only thing missing is Mario hurling his 4-iron into the pond while screaming obscenities. Oh well, next time.	8
Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	The *Mario Kart* legacy remains intact, offering a highly enjoyable co-op mode and great track design.	10
Mario Party 4	Nintendo	There are few things better in life than three friends, *Mario Party*, and a healthy flow of alcoholic beverages (if you're legal, of course).	8
Metal Gear Solid: The Twin Snakes	Konami	*Metal Gear* magic with drastically improved A.I. and first-person shooting.	9
Metroid Prime	Nintendo	As if they dissected *Super Metroid*, added a dimension, and put it back together again with slick graphics. In fact, it's exactly like that.	10
MVP Baseball 2004	Electronic Arts	Includes every AA and AAA farm club and a unique pitching meter—and looks great to boot. A home run! Heh.	8
NBA Live 2004	Electronic Arts	Should you upgrade to the latest version of *Live*? As new announcer Marv Albert would say, "YES!"	8
NBA Street Vol. 2	Electronic Arts	Even better than the first, *Vol. 2* takes you through the legendary players and teams of the NBA's storied history. A great deal of fun.	9
NCAA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	EA took the excellent *NCAA 2003*, added some new blocking and pass-defense enhancements, and produced another winner.	8
Need for Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	All the thrills of illegal street racing without having to run from the cops. Unless you steal your copy.	9
NFL Street	Electronic Arts	It's like football, except more fun.	8
NHL 2004	Electronic Arts	It doesn't look as good as its competitors, but then again, you don't need to be pretty to score goals.	8
NHL Hitz Pro	Midway	It's not realistic, but it's the closest we'll ever get to a new *Ice Hockey* or *Blades of Steel*.	8
Pac-Man Vs.	Namco	More than 20 years after the game's release, *GMR* reviews *Pac-Man*. It's sort of good, we guess.	8
Phantasy Star Online: Episode I & II	Sega	Unhealthily addictive. The pursuit of rare items helps one ignore the somewhat repetitive battles (and the $9 monthly fee).	9
Pikmin	Nintendo	*Mario* creator Shigeru Miyamoto got the idea for this quirky strategy game from observing his personal garden. What kind of garden?	8
Pokémon Colosseum	Nintendo	Can an edgier design and 3D Pokémon in dual battles woo back those Pokémaniacs?	8
Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time	Ubisoft	This is the right way to bring back a classic...if only the camera were more manageable.	8
Resident Evil	Capcom	This remake could almost be described as a new game. But is it really *Resident Evil* without the laughably bad voice acting?	8
Resident Evil 0	Capcom	This one actually *is* a brand-new game, with significant changes, such as droppable items and the dirty-sounding partner swapping.	8
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi Universal	Holy crap! It's a good *Simpsons* game! Gamers will enjoy the fun driving missions, and fans will eat up the references.	8
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	All the familiar goodness of *The Sims*, but now with branching career paths, two-player co-op, and more.	9
Skies of Arcadia: Legends	Sega	If you missed it on Dreamcast—and many of you did—you've been given a second chance. It's even got new characters.	8
Soul Calibur II	Namco	Better than the original, but not as innovative as we would have liked. The single-player game isn't as good as *VF4: Evolution*'s.	9
SSX 3	Electronic Arts	EA ditches individual courses in favor of one giant mountain and ends up making the best *SSX* yet.	9
Star Wars Rogue Squadron II	LucasArts	At times, *Rogue Squadron II* syncs closely with scenes from the movies. Impressive when you consider it took only nine months to make.	9
Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	Maybe not quite as groundbreaking as *Super Mario 64*, but even when Nintendo "misses," it makes a big splash.	9
Super Monkey Ball	Sega	Monkeys in balls! An exceptional game based on a simple concept; some of the later levels will eat you for lunch.	8
Super Monkey Ball 2	Sega	Even more monkeys in balls running around for your entertainment! The extra game modes add quite a bit to the simple concept.	8
Super Smash Bros. Melee	Nintendo	A Nintendo fanatic's dream, if only for the exhaustive gallery of collectible Nintendorabilia. Plus, you can beat the crap out of Jigglypuff.	9
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	Tiger Woods made golf cool (sort of). *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004* makes golf games cool (sort of).	9
Tony Hawk's Underground	Activision	The depth and versatility of *THUG*'s customizable gameplay make it the best *Hawk* yet.	10
Ultimate Muscle	Bandai	If the soap-opera antics of the WWE don't go far enough over the top, perhaps the wacky *Ultimate Muscle* will be more to your liking.	9
Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	A refreshingly original platformer/brawler with an outstanding art style and rock-solid mechanics.	9
WarioWare Inc.: Mega Party Game$	Nintendo	All the addictive madness of the GBA minigames, available in multiplayer modes that will kick up your competitive streak.	8
Wave Race: Blue Storm	Nintendo	Great wave physics, awesome weather effects, and a deeper control scheme than the original. An underrated gem of a racer.	8

[BUY!]

SERIOUS SAM: NEXT ENCOUNTER



Sure, this isn't the best game in the world, but if you're jonesing for pure run-n-gun action on GameCube, you won't go wrong with this title, especially given its $19.99 price tag.

[AVOID!]

JUDGE DREDD: DREDD VS. DEATH



Judge's verdict: dreck. Yeah, so even though the GameCube needs more shooters, this one we can't recommend. Monotonous levels, slow response time, idiotic bosses...like we said: dreck.

GBA TOP 50 PICK A PACK OF PORTABLE PLEASURE

TITLE	PUBLISHER	WHAT WE SAY	GMR RATING
Advance Wars	Nintendo	Turn-based military strategy that should be a part of everyone's GBA library. Once you get sucked in, it's hard to pull yourself away.	8
Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	*Wars 2* adds only a single new unit, but the game's chock-full of new maps, terrain, and CO powers.	8
Baseball Advance	THQ	There are only four stadiums and no multiplayer, but it's still a great game of baseball.	8
Boktai: The Sun is in Your Hand	Konami	It's gonna be a bright (bright!), briiiiight sun-shiny day. Well, it had damn well better be.	8
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	Konami	Better sound and castle design than *Harmony of Dissonance*, but much too short. The soul system is ace, though.	8
Castlevania: Circle of the Moon	Konami	*Castlevania* is meant to be played in two dimensions, and this game shows why. A complex card system governs your special abilities.	9
Castlevania: Harmony of Dissonance	Konami	The second *Castlevania* is one of the best reasons to own a Game Boy Advance. The colors are brighter and the bosses are bigger.	9
Chu Chu Rocket!	Sega	A highly addictive and highly cute puzzle-action game from Sega that's best played with multiple friends. Mouse mania!	7
Fire Emblem	Nintendo	If *Advance Wars* and *Final Fantasy Tactics* fell in love and had a baby, they'd call it *Fire Emblem*.	8
F-Zero: Maximum Velocity	Nintendo	A new *F-Zero* based on the classic SNES game, with improved graphics, new tracks, and four-player support.	8
Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Square Enix	At long last, we have a new *Final Fantasy Tactics*—and it's absolutely spectacular. Set aside 60 hours of free time....	9
Final Fight One	Capcom	Another enhanced port of an SNES original. How come mayors of large cities don't go on ass-kicking rampages anymore?	8
Golden Sun	Nintendo	A deep combat engine and brilliant graphics make this one of the better RPGs available on GBA.	8
Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Picks up right where the first one left off. The battle system remains basically unchanged, but the puzzles are much more rewarding.	8
Gradius Galaxies	Konami	Konami's classic shooter series translates to the portable very well. Great graphics and plenty of challenge.	9
GT Advance 3	THQ	The *GT Advance* series has always been technically marvelous, and *GTA3* (yeah, we know) finally has a battery-save function!	8
Guilty Gear X Advance	Sammy	Not surprisingly, the animation and soundtrack take a hit, but it still plays like its big brother versions.	7
Kirby: Nightmare in Dreamland	Nintendo	A remake of the NES classic *Kirby's Adventure* with updated graphics and multiplayer support.	8
Klonoa: Empire of Dreams	Namco	Straying from the original formula, this *Klonoa* is more of a puzzle game than a platformer, with great graphics and sound.	8
Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past	Nintendo	Invite three friends over and you've got a bona fide *Zelda* party. Drink red medicine till you puke and skinny-dip in Lake Hylia!	9
Lufia: The Ruins of Lore	Atlus	Perennially overshadowed by Square's offerings, the *Lufia* series is just as engaging as *Final Fantasy*. It's also more challenging.	8
Lunar Legend	Ubisoft	The anime cut-scenes and superb voice acting may be gone, but the great *Lunar* gameplay and story remain intact.	8
Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga	Nintendo	It's the only place you'll find the Tanoomba, and that's reason enough to buy this stellar (and hilarious) RPG.	9
Mario Kart: Super Circuit	Nintendo	A balanced blend of *Super Mario Kart* and *Mario Kart 64* that even includes all the tracks from the former.	8
Mega Man Battle Network 2	Capcom	More of an RPG than an platformer, the *Battle Network* series is a nice change of pace for Mega Man and pals.	7
Mega Man Battle Network 3	Capcom	*Battle Network 3* is pretty much more of the same with a few minor additions, but it's already a great series.	8
Mega Man Zero	Capcom	A difficult yet engaging installment of the *X* side story that is played with Zero, who is equipped with an arm cannon and beamsaber.	7
Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	The follow-up to *Super Metroid* is eight years late, but the wait was well worth it. An adventure that ends way too quickly.	9
Metroid: Zero Mission	Nintendo	True to its roots, with an expanded and finessed story.	9
Ninja Five-O	Konami	A challenging platformer that brings back fond memories of *Bionic Commando*, complete with throwing stars and katanas.	7
Phantasy Star Collection	THQ	Straightforward classic RPG action that's been overlooked for far too long. Includes *Phantasy Star 1, 2,* and *3*.	9
Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire	Nintendo	Aside from 2-on-2 battles, the first GBA *Pokémon* combo doesn't really change the original formula.	7
Rayman Advance	Ubisoft	Rayman is just as good in 2D as he is in 3D. The game looks great and provides a decent challenge.	8
The Sims: Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	The chance for a more successful life is in the palm of your hand.	8
Sonic Advance 2	THQ	*Sonic Advance 2* is much improved over the first one, and it connects to GameCube's *Sonic Adventure* games to boot.	8
Sonic Pinball Party	Sega	Not limited to just hedgehogs, Sega's solid pinballer features tables from the classics *Nights* and *Samba de Amigo*.	8
Street Fighter Alpha 3	Capcom	Sure, the limiting button configuration prevents *SFA3* from being a completely accurate port, but it's great nonetheless.	8
Super Dodgeball Advance	Atlus	You're not going to find that many dodgeball games on the market, so thankfully, this one is worthwhile. Better in multiplayer.	7
Super Ghouls & Ghosts	Capcom	Remember how frustrated you got playing through *Ghouls & Ghosts*? Get ready to do it all over again.	8
Super Mario Advance: Super Mario 2	Nintendo	Aside from the odd naming system, you can't really complain about a portable version of *Super Mario Bros. 2*.	8
Super Mario Advance 2: Mario World	Nintendo	There's really not much else that can be said except "portable *Super Mario World*" and "you should buy it."	9
Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	Yoshi is the star of this show, one of the greatest 2D platformers ever put to silicon. There are even a couple of new bonus levels.	9
Super Monkey Ball Jr.	THQ	An excellent port of the game that sold many a GameCube. THQ even included Monkey Bowling and Monkey Fight!	8
Super Puzzle Fighter II	Capcom	Sometimes, you just get bored with *Tetris*. *Puzzle Fighter II* is a fantastic port of a fantastic and highly addictive game. Buy it now.	8
Super Street Fighter II	Capcom	The combo of *SFA3*, *Guilty Gear X Advance*, and *Super Street Fighter II* is devastating. And you don't even need any quarters!	8
Tactics Ogre: The Knights of Lodis	Atlus	An incredibly deep strategy-RPG with a branching story line and a rewarding battle system.	8
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3	Activision	It's amazing how Activision managed to cram *Tony Hawk* into a cartridge while keeping the essence of the console version intact.	8
Virtua Tennis	THQ	A surprisingly faithful rendition of the console versions with good visuals and an engaging world tour mode. The best tennis on GBA.	8
Wario Land 4	Nintendo	The *Wario* series of platformers has always been excellent, and this one is no exception. Short but incredibly sweet.	8
WarioWare Inc.	Nintendo	A large collection of microgames fuels *WarioWare*'s madcap mayhem. The freshest game we've seen in a long time.	9

[BUY!]

BOOKWORM

PopCap has ported its addictive puzzler for gaming on the go. It's as addictive as *Tetris*, and with a title like *Bookworm*, you can justify it as "educational."



[AVOID!]

SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW

Ubisoft seems to have forgotten that it was making this game for GBA. It looks OK, but it's not fun and saving is a pain in the arse.





GAME GEEZER

HE'S OLD! HE'S PISSED!

SLOW DOWN, CONSOLE EVOLUTION!

"Hey, Game Geezer, what's that thing you got there? Is that a toaster?"

Ehh? What? It's a Dreamcast, ya morons! Just about the finest dang console system ever invented! A toaster!? I oughta kick all your asses right now!

"Sorry, Mr. Geezer. We've just never heard of a Dreamcast. Is that, like, from the 1950s?"

That's it. Get out. I can't take any more. Git!

"We're sorry, Mr. Geezer. We just don't really know much about these old consoles from the Stone Age."

OK, now you're makin' me mad. Siddown. Shuddup. Learn yourself a thing or two. You see this here Dreamcast? Tell me! Do ya see it!?

"Yes, we see it, sir. And, um, Mr. Geezer? You're kind of spitting on us."

Too bad! Now listen to me. This Dreamcast is only 6 years old. You hear me? Six years! More time has passed since most of you last kissed a girl. Am I right? Especially you there, the pasty-lookin' skeleton with the greasy hair and the *Ninja Gaiden* T-shirt! Eat some meat, for Pete's sake! Get out in the sun! This isn't a zombie movie! It's your life!

"Mr. Geezer? The consoles?"

Huh? Yeah! The consoles. The point is, all these damn things ought to have much longer life spans than they do. Look at the graphics on this Dreamcast! They rule! Still! You won't ever get a much better-looking game than *Ecco the Dolphin*. Sure, the game was too freakin' hard and it was about being a dolphin, which is a pretty dorky idea for a game and maybe one of the reasons why the system failed, but never mind! That's not the point! The point is, if we all still had Dreamcasts instead of PS2s or Xboxes or—if you remember what these are—GameCubes, we'd still be having a great time as gamers! We'd all still be ignoring our jobs and schoolwork and family and loved ones, just like we were born to do, and we'd be having a blast with a buncha games that would still look great!

IF WE STILL HAD DREAMCASTS INSTEAD OF PS2S, WE'D STILL BE HAVING A GREAT TIME!

It's crazy how shortsighted and impatient gamers are. We can't settle in with a new machine for two minutes before everyone starts talking about the next consoles already. Here's what I have in my living room, piled in a heap next to my *Matlock* videotapes: an SNES, a Nintendo 64, a PlayStation, a Dreamcast, a Saturn, an Xbox, a GameCube, and a PS2. Who needs all this junk? I haven't finished three games on any one of 'em, ever! But I keep buying more!

And now guess what's happening. Yep—everyone's begun yammering their fool heads off about Xbox 2 and PlayStation 3. For what? Why? You may see the other editors for this here magazine getting all hot and bothered by the new machines, but I've had enough. I'm done. I'm gettin' off the horse. No more new consoles for me. Not until I beat *Final Fantasy III* on SNES first. And this dumbass Dreamcast dolphin game. Yeah, sure, Microsoft's and Sony's new machines will have all the latest fancy new graphics and such, but here's my official review right now: So what! Get lost! Good-bye! You get no more of my money! Ever!

'Course, I suppose, maybe Mrs. Geezer could buy me one for Christmas....



The views expressed by Game Geezer are his own and do not necessarily reflect the views of *GMR*.









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ATTENTION! YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE MAGAZINE. THE DREAMCAST IS NOT DEAD; IT'S JUST SLEEPING.


"The best looking Xbox game we've ever seen. And we've seen them all."
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CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

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THE CHRONICLES OF

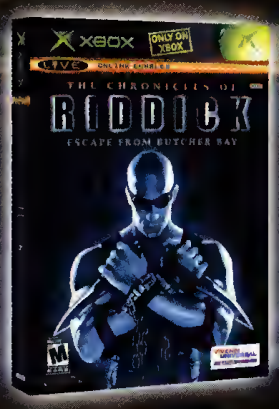
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